

**Freedom in the Abstract: An Investigation of  
the Men's Movement in New Zealand  
and the United States**

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ABSTRACT

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explains how the men's movements in New Zealand and the United States highlight the interaction between social structures and the individual in determining how masculinity is defined.

Hegemonic structures, most notably patriarchy, provide a background of stable definitions of social reality for men. The men's movement in both countries has been slow to overtly challenge these social structures. Rather they have contested definitions of masculinity in the foreground of institutional structures which has resulted in a widespread lack of radical change to existing social structures and a perpetuation of unequal power relationships between men and women. Men's oppression is identified as an institutional arrangement that limits men's lives and perpetuates hegemonic structures that oppress others, most notably women.

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Gur a mhile maith agat!/Thank you very much!

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

It has always struck me that men who write self-help type books or books on the men's movement often begin with their own personal story of how, as men, they came to realise that they needed to change the way they lived their lives. Many of the men I interviewed also told me of their initial struggle to begin a process of change. The stories are often similar but seem to resonate for the men involved in a way that is difficult to describe. It seems almost as if this revelation of the necessity of change came at a time in each man's life when his vocabulary of verbal, emotional or physical expression was too limited to be able to communicate what he felt and thought.

The desire of men to tell their stories seems to reflect a similar preoccupation of the early feminist movement in the telling of women's stories. Traditionally men may tell each other what they do and what they have achieved but rarely speak of who they are or what they feel.

The importance of breaking men's silence will be seen when men use the telling of stories and the sharing that that entails as a point of departure in the constant quest for greater understanding and harmony

between the sexes. To enter into this quest I will briefly share a small, but pivotal, part of my story.

Growing up as a man in New Zealand has been a process of accommodation and rejection. I say this because, like many men, I have felt an intense discomfort with traditional notions of masculinity that have pervaded New Zealand culture. Some parts of this masculine culture I rejected, whereas other parts I adopted, sometimes for no other reason than to "be one of the boys." Especially in my early twenties I began to question the prescribed role of masculinity that encouraged me to be, as John Stoltenberg puts it, "the man there." Being "the man there" means being in charge, maintaining hierarchical relationships with both men and women, being emotionally non-expressive and restricting physical contact with other humans to sexual encounters with women. I must confess that for a long time I simply accepted that this was the way things ought to be until I had a pivotal life changing experience from which I have never looked back.

I became involved in a relationship with a woman and was constantly confused and bewildered about the relationship. In hindsight I recognise that I expected her to carry the emotional side of the relationship and although I cared very deeply for her I was unable to adequately express that to her. I was also confused about my expectations of how both she and I should behave. In short I was

unaware of the effects of my gender conditioning. Through the course of the relationship my consciousness was raised to the point that I began to accept that gender was socially constructed and the life experiences of women and men are radically affected by the social roles that gender prescribes for them. It was my desire to make the relationship fulfilling for both of us that forced me to try and understand how her life experiences had been affected by her gender conditioning, and in turn this led me to examine the effects of my own gender conditioning.

As a man still heavily influenced by my gender conditioning, I found this relationship to be a very challenging period of my life. Problems that arose in the relationship forced me to confront issues that I had, in many cases, never even thought about before. In essence this relationship marked the beginning of my own consciousness raising experience, something that continues to this day. This process has involved reading "men's books", attending and leading support groups, giving and receiving counselling, talking issues through with friends and during my university training, theorising how individuals interact with society. Although the relationship is now long since over, the constant support, interest and love that she has given to me has encouraged me to continue to raise my consciousness about gender issues and to continually search for ways in which to become a more thoughtful, caring, justice-loving man.

In the years following this pivotal experience I have continued to search for a knowledge and understanding of "manhood." I found the multiplicity of perspectives on masculinity confusing because my search for the meaning of manhood was a search for "the right way" to be a man. I had not realised that there were in fact many ways to be a man.

Depending upon their own unique life experiences different men will accept different ideas from the diversity of perspectives on masculinity that the men's movement offers. This diversity of perspectives greatly increases the chances of inclusiveness for all men in the men's movement by highlighting the different experiences of men.

Scrutinising the diversity of men's life experiences has precipitated a paradigm shift in social change programmes for men, most notably in stopping violence programmes. In recent years these programmes have become increasingly tailored to specific groups of people suggesting a reorientation of the assumptions that underlie these programmes. The question is no longer "What works?" But rather, "What works for whom?" Part of my interest in conducting this research then, has been to find out how the men who lead groups and conduct courses for men, construct masculinity and how they are working to challenge and change men. In the process of this research my own understanding of what it is to be a man has been enhanced considerably and in presenting this research I hope that others will also gain in their understanding.

My primary research interest is in the New Zealand men's movement and in choosing to compare it with the American men's movement I shall demonstrate what the similarities and differences between them are. I shall also necessarily consider the interaction between the two movements and consider if, and to what extent, each country influences the other.

One of the first difficulties I experienced in talking to people about the "men's movement" was one of definition. When I have asked people what the men's movement is, either they do not know or their answer contains some reference to the image of the wildman, beating drums or sweat lodges, or in more humorous moments to bowel movements. It is hardly surprising that many people conjure up images of the "wildman in the woods" when they think of the men's movement given the considerable media attention that has been paid to this particular part of the movement. However these activities represent only a fraction of the many ways in which men are examining masculinity. There are many other things that men are doing that do not receive such fervent coverage by the media. For instance, there are men working to stop violence and sexual abuse of women and children, men protesting against sexist legislation, men supporting each other as they explore their emotional lives in men's support groups, and men who strive for social justice for all on a personal, day to day basis.

These diverse examinations and questionings of the lives of men reinforces Keith Thompson's idea that "[m]asculinity does not exist...[rather] there are *many* masculinities, multiple ways to be a man."<sup>1</sup> This does not mean to say that there are no commonalities between differing types of masculinities. Instead Thompson's definition highlights the need to reject conceptualising masculinity as a monolithic phenomenon. The great variety of ways that men live out their lives stretches out on a continuum of experience. The multiplicity of perspectives on masculinity therefore suggests that there is no "right" way to be a man, rather, there are many ways to be a man.

The diversity of ways in which men experience and live their lives as men presented me with a problem for my research. How could I determine and document the diversity of ways in which men construct masculinity? I chose to interview leaders of the New Zealand men's movement. This question will be addressed more fully in my methodology section but introduces another compelling question. Are the most articulate voices of the men's movement - the leaders - representative of the overall population of men in either the United States or New Zealand?<sup>2</sup> In the United States there is little

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Thompson ed. To be a Man: In Search of the deep Masculine, (Los Angeles: Jeremy P Tarcher, 1991), pxv.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this discussion "leaders" will be defined as those men who specifically address masculinity in one of the following ways: they run courses for men; they facilitate support groups for men; they counsel men; or they are a published

demographic information available about the composition of the men's movement although "there is a perception that its participants are predominantly white, middle class, heterosexual males."<sup>3</sup> One can therefore tentatively conclude that the men's movement in the United States is not representative of the overall population of men.

In New Zealand, men's movement leaders are predominantly white, middle class, and middle age and are therefore not representative either. However my interviewees suggest that participants are more representative of the overall population and cover a wide range of class, age and racial backgrounds. The rationale and significance of talking exclusively with men's movement leaders will be explored in my methodology chapter.

Considering how masculinity is constructed can quickly become bogged down in a myriad of questions and contradictory opinions. Any analysis of masculinity needs to consider both the personal and structural interactions with the culture that maintains and shapes the dominant modes of masculinity. The varying perspectives within the men's movement in both countries are all interested in changing or maintaining

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author.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Shiffman, "The Men's Movement: An Exploratory Empirical Investigation", in Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity, ed. Michael Kimmel (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1987), p300.



how masculinity is defined. Understanding how masculinity is shaped and maintained is essential if the culturally defined notion of masculinity is to be altered. However this labyrinth is manageable if we stay focused on what I believe are the four central questions pertinent to this discussion of masculinity and the men's movement.

### 1. *How do Men Perceive Their Own Existence?*

Regardless of one's perspective on gender, masculinity remains a dominant force in determining the reality of daily life for men in modern society. Masculinity is constructed by and subject to social forces. The task of defining or describing how masculinity is constructed is difficult.

However we can make things comprehensible if we distinguish three components of masculinity: the masculine gender role; the stereotype of masculinity; and the gender ideal.<sup>4</sup> The masculine gender role describes behaviours and attitudes that men can be observed to display. The stereotype of masculinity relates what people think the behaviours and attitudes of men are. The gender ideal is what people think the gender role for men should be.

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<sup>4</sup> The definitions of "masculine gender role", "stereotype of masculinity" and "gender ideal" are taken from Kenneth Clatterbaugh's Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity, (Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 1990), p3.

The gender role and stereotype are conceptually quite distinct from each other. If we were interested in analysing the gender role, we would need to study an identifiable group of men. If we were interested in the stereotype of masculinity then we would need to survey the general population, which could include men, about what they thought was typical of men. The stereotype and the gender role may even be contradictory. In certain groups of men however, the stereotype may become internalised so that it actually becomes part of the gender role.

One can quickly see that what people think men should be may be completely different from what men are, or from what men are thought to be. All three components are historically situated and reflect historical, ethnic, or religious ideas of what specific groups of men are and should be.

## 2. How is the Hegemonic Structure Which Enshrines

### Masculinity Sustained or Maintained?

Merely describing a hegemonic structure is, at best, quite boring unless an explanation of how that structure came about and what maintains it is offered. The analysis of the New Zealand and American men's movement presented in this thesis will demonstrate they all have one thing in common in this respect; they all offer some aspect of

masculinity as an explanation for the perpetuation of hegemonic structures. An understanding of what maintains or explains the social order is of vital importance before any transformation can take place. Robert Wuthnow in his book Cultural Analysis synthesises the work of Peter Berger. Wuthnow's analysis of Berger's work suggests that

Social order is possible only through collective participation in symbols. The dominant order of a society is provided by a coherent, over-arching organization of symbols which provide a meaningful world for individuals to live in. A personal sense of order hinges on an appropriation of an identity or set of identities that, whether 'deviant' or 'normal', is reckoned with the larger social world.<sup>5</sup>

Masculinity then, conceived of as an elaborately organised system of symbols and symbolic action provides a "meaningful world for individuals to live in." Men, as a group, gain "a personal sense of order" in their lives by appropriating an identity that is essentially approved of by "the larger social world." Through collective participation in this symbolic world they gain acceptance for themselves and provide it for others who also adhere to the significance of the symbolic world. Adherence to, and participation with, this symbolic world has both benefits and costs that will be analyzed.

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Wuthnow et al., Cultural Analysis: The Work of Peter L. Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, and Jurgen Habermas, (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p26.

### 3. Do men suggest what could be a better existence?

Wuthnow's analysis of Berger, applied to men, would suggest that once men have an understanding of the interactive nature of culture making that they will no longer see themselves as being mechanistically determined. In these terms Wuthnow has called for research to "concern itself with an understanding of the subjective meaning or intentionality of those engaged in everyday life."<sup>6</sup> By gaining an understanding of "subjective meaning" research will be able to demonstrate the reasons or intentions that underlie the actions of everyday life.

The question of intentionality is highly relevant to the men's movement. For once men have an understanding of their gender conditioning and the ways that they, as individuals, maintain oppressive social structures what do they intend to do with this knowledge? Will they continue to see themselves as mechanistically determined - as slaves to the rhythm of the social structure? Or will they agree with Wuthnow's synthesis of Berger's belief that emphasising "the subjective meanings actors impute to their activity implies that actors themselves are "rational" and therefore "free" and not mechanistically

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<sup>6</sup> R. Wuthnow et al., Cultural Analysis, p29.

determined."<sup>7</sup> Will a better existence mean a better existence for men, or for men and women? Will men seek to maintain the status quo or will they seek to reconstruct their culture so that it is more altruistic?

#### 4. How could this better existence be achieved?

So far then this set of questions has told us where men are, why they are there, and where they want to be. As we shall see the men's movement is divided about how to achieve the changes that each perspective favours. However the methods used fall into three broad categories.

- (1) Challenge institutions and social structures directly by lobbying for changes to laws.
- (2) Achieve change through transformation of the individual. This method is predicated on the premise that the behaviours and attitudes of transformed individuals will "rub off" on others.
- (3) Combine direct challenges to institutions with individual transformation. Our ability to accurately measure cause and affect variables makes measuring the effectiveness of any of these methods a contested area for social scientists.

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<sup>7</sup> R. Wuthnow et al., Cultural Analysis, p29.

## Summary

Any analysis of masculinity needs to be grounded within a framework that emphasises both the personal and structural implications of differing constructions of masculinity. This framework is necessary to assess alternative visions of masculinity and to establish an agenda for change. Through examination of the gender role and stereotype of masculinity the current nature of social reality for men can be established and alternative visions can become more focused on what is ideal. However these alternative visions need to reflect an understanding of how hegemonic structures in society maintain unequal power relationships between men and women. As yet there is no consensus amongst the men's movements in either country about the socially constructed nature of masculinity.

In chapter four I will examine the different perspectives on masculinity that are prevalent in each country and their basic philosophical groundings. The ways in which different constructions of masculinity accommodate and resist the dominant hegemonic order will also be highlighted. My research began with the assumption that American culture had a considerable influence upon New Zealand culture and this assumption will be explored in chapter five. In my sixth chapter I have organised comments from my interviewees to reflect

how men's gender training affects their lives.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

Due to the nature of comparative study my methodology is necessarily complex and thus I have chosen to explicate my methodology in two sections. The first section will deal with the interviews that I conducted in New Zealand and the second section will deal with the nature of my research on the United States.

My research had several goals. Firstly, to document the ways in which men accommodate and resist the dominant hegemonic order and its construction of masculinity. Secondly, to gain an understanding of the kinds of trends, both past and present, that the New Zealand men's movement exhibited and to then compare it with the movement in the United States. Thirdly, I was interested in determining to what extent there was an exchange of information and ideas taking place between the respective men's movements of each country. As such I was interested in seeing how men view their own collective progress, or lack of progress, in challenging traditional notions of masculinity.

My analysis is primarily informed by the theoretical assumptions of Antonio Gramsci and Peter Berger. I have chosen to utilise



secondary sources provided by T.J.Jackson Lears and Robert Wuthnow respectively because they are able to synthesise large amounts of work from each author into a cohesive theoretical framework. I acknowledge that this approach is not wholly desirable but it has enabled me to more easily access Berger's and Gramsci's complex, and at times convoluted, language.

My research goals are grounded within the methodological framework for phenomenological sociology suggested by Peter Berger. Wuthnow describes the task of this kind of research is

to describe human experience as it is lived and not as it is theorized about - to account for social reality from the point of view of the actors involved.<sup>1</sup>

Phenomenological sociology involves analysing and interpreting primary source material just as any other research method does. However it differs from other types of sociological research because the accounts "from the point of view of the actors involved" take precedence over, and organise, the presentation of the research. The actors involved describe their unique human experience "as it is lived" and it is the researcher who must develop a theoretical framework to describe and portray that experience. For this type of research the interview is the most preferred method. I used a semi-structured format so as to enable the interviewees to feel at ease to elaborate on any of their answers and

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<sup>1</sup> R. Wuthnow et al., Cultural Analysis, p73.

for them to have a guiding hand in the direction the interview would take. In this way I hoped to maximise my chances of having them describe their experience "as it is lived".

Qualitative analysis is ideally suited to this orientation because it seeks to emphasise the subjective side of culture. The responses of my interviewees are significant because they illustrate some of the intersubjective meanings men hold about the world in which they live. My interviewees, due to their positions within the men's movement are uniquely situated to interpret the structural and cultural conditions that affect the lives of New Zealand men.

It seemed to me that traditional notions of masculinity encouraged men to maintain their commanding position in the patriarchy. However the diversity of social movements in general, and the men's movement in particular, shows that this hegemonic structure is continually buffeted by internal and external forces and as such it is perpetually renegotiated. I will give an example to illustrate this point. Men's Rights advocates claim that feminism has eroded the social order to such an extent that numerous social ills have resulted. They believe that feminists are, in essence, "attacking" the social position of men. In these terms Men's Rights activists believe that they are "fighting" to maintain their position in society. Feminists challenge the cultural dominance of men by exerting internal and external pressures on patriarchy. These pressures

manifest themselves through personalised action, for example directly challenging sexist behaviour, and by lobbying for legislation and social programmes that will enable women to gain equality with men. By exerting this two-pronged approach men are forced to renegotiate the terms of their dominance over women.

How cultural dominance is maintained in the face of this perpetual process of renegotiation is an important point considered by Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci illustrated how hegemonic structures cannot be maintained by imposing a moral order alone. Rather, those who are being oppressed give their consent to be oppressed. If society existed in a vacuum then this model would dictate extremely rigid patterns of behaviour for both men and women. But, as Gramsci points out, hegemonies do not exist in a vacuum but are in a constant state of renegotiation, continually being buffeted by a wide array of pressure groups and liberation movements.

The existence of liberation movements in society who oppose established hegemonic structures suggests that those who are oppressed both resist and accommodate the dominant order. They are caught in a double bind. Jon Snodgrass, an early leader of the Profeminist men's movement in the United States, identifies this double bind.

I heard the men's movement criticized for being 'subjectivist', 'individualistic' and 'bourgeois.' I also heard radical males criticized for being 'masculine-identified' and 'dogmatic.' Both

criticisms seemed correct to me.<sup>2</sup>

The double bind that Snodgrass identifies, centres on the conflicting nature of criticism of the men's movement. Some parts of the men's movement have resisted their cultural upbringing and have attempted to step out of the oppressor role, attempting to create a new social order wherein men and women are equal. But even this genuinely motivated action in itself demonstrates how these men also accommodate and participate with their culturally sanctioned position of power. It is for this reason that Snodgrass concludes that "both criticisms seemed correct". For by utilising their position of power to influence other men and women in an attempt to define what equality between the sexes will mean, the men's movement colludes with their culturally approved positions of power.

I found this double bind interesting and was especially intrigued by the ways in which men accommodate and resist their culturally approved position of power. Within the New Zealand context I therefore decided to select interview candidates who would be able to highlight the conflicting tensions inherent in men trying to change both themselves and their society. The men that I chose to interview therefore included men who ran courses, programmes, or support

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<sup>2</sup> Jon Snodgrass, ed. A Book of Readings For Men Against Sexism, (Albion, California: Times Change Press, 1977), p8.

services for men as well as counsellors and psychotherapists. Because of their position as "leaders" they would be uniquely situated to provide an informed assessment of how men construct masculinity, and how they accommodate and resist traditional constructions of masculinity. My hope was that their experience and involvement in the men's movement would also enable them to identify trends of the past, as well as the present and future directions of the men's movement. Their public involvement with, in many cases, large numbers of men from diverse backgrounds would also enable them to identify and comment on the power relationships that affect men's lives.

Having decided the social location of the men I wanted to interview I then had to select my pool of interviewees. Several factors influenced my decision: (1) Their geographical location; (2) Demographic considerations of the possible interviewee population; (3) The availability of suitable candidates who were willing to be interviewed; (4) The number of interviewees.

(1) *Geographical Location*

The first major constraints on my research were that of time and finances. I therefore decided to restrict the possible pool of interviewees to Christchurch, the city in which I live. I considered contacting other

possible interviewees throughout New Zealand by mail or telephone but eventually rejected these forms of interviewing as inferior. A large part of my interviewing work was reliant upon being able to quickly establish rapport with the interviewee and being able to use visual clues to guide my questioning process. Both of these conditions would be difficult if not impossible to reproduce in an interview conducted by mail or telephone.

In a country where 85% of the population live in urban areas Christchurch is the third largest city in New Zealand. Although the ethnic mix in Christchurch is not as great as in Auckland (the largest city), the ratio of males to females remains consistent with the national average. Non-Europeans comprise around 9.5% of the total population in the Canterbury region as compared with the national total of Non-Europeans which equates to nearly 20% of the total population. Nearly 63% of the total population fall within the "working age" bracket of 16-64 years of age. In these terms Christchurch can be seen to be fairly representative of the overall New Zealand European population.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Statistics are based upon 1991 census information. The ratio of males to females is 97.2 per 100 females. New Zealand Official Yearbook '95, (Auckland: Statistics New Zealand, 1995), pp115-131.

(2) Demographic Considerations of the Possible

Interviewee Population

I decided that interviewing women on their opinions and concerns about the men's movement would introduce a diversity of opinions that is beyond the scope of this research. For similar reasons I chose to restrict my interviewees to white men. There are agencies in Christchurch, and indeed all over New Zealand, that deal with Maori and Pacific Island men, but once again I felt that to introduce them as a variable into my research would introduce questions beyond the focus of my analysis.

At the same time I have tried to cast my net as wide as I can. I have tried to gain a multiplicity of perspectives on the men's movement. Other factors that could influence the results were class, age, and sexual orientation. Due to the small number of interviewees it was virtually impossible to control for class and age. Class orientation was overwhelmingly middle to upper-middle class and there was an age spread of 35 years.

The gay men's movement, in the United States in particular, has been prominent in drawing attention to issues that concern men and has highlighted the importance of homophobia as a means of enforcing disunity and hierarchical relationships between men. However, I felt

that as far as the interview process went I would not seek out men involved in the gay men's movement as this would introduce a myriad of questions beyond the focus of my research.

(3) *The Availability of Suitable Candidates Who Were  
Willing to be Interviewed*

In determining which men were "suitable" for interviewing I restricted my interview population to those who specifically had dealings with men concerning issues of masculinity. I chose this group of men to utilise their experience and exposure to large numbers of men, and also to take advantage of their "insider knowledge" of the men's movement. Interviewing large numbers of men would have been impractical due to restrictions of time and finances. The criteria that I applied allowed some flexibility in the selection of candidates however.

(4) *The Number of Interviewees*

I chose not to interview "men off the street" as the number of men required to gain a representative sample of men within the men's movement would have been prohibitive. I was more interested in conducting in-depth interviews and in examining the foundations of their



knowledge structure than carrying out large scale surveys.

As a result I orientated my questioning technique away from the personal to a more generalised type of questioning. In the end I chose ten men who I considered were representative of the kind of work that is currently being undertaken with men in New Zealand. It should be noted that this is by no means an exhaustive survey of the work that is being undertaken by the men's movement in New Zealand. However it can serve to demonstrate some of the orientations and how they are similar and different to those currently in vogue in the United States.

Implicit within my approach to interviewing was the assumption that the data I was collecting would be influenced both by cultural norms and by my own presence and behaviour as the interviewer. Being clear about the unavoidable biases that a researcher brings to their "data collection" was of immense help for me in determining how to proceed.

Having established a pool of interviewees I began to consider what biases I would bring to the interview situation. After considering factors such as age, race, class, and personal demeanour, I concluded that there was a high degree of compatibility between myself and my interviewees. Having never conducted a series of interviews before however I was apprehensive about how I would perform my role and how I would be perceived and treated.

My first interview was therefore an important learning experience for me as a budding researcher. In my second and subsequent interviews I was much more relaxed about the process. The interviewees and I took joint responsibility for the interview process and my subjects went into considerable detail to explain their experiences.

The nature of my research on the United States was of a completely different "flavour" from what was conducted in New Zealand. Primary material was selected due to its recognised status as being representative of a particular perspective. Kenneth Clatterbaugh identifies these perspectives in Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity as New Traditionalists; Profeminist; Men's Rights; Mythopoetics and Spiritualists; and Group Specific. These perspectives will be analyzed in detail in chapter four.

Robert Bly's Iron John is recognised as a representative text of the Mythopoetic men's perspective and was thus utilised as a primary source. However, I was also interested in developing a critique of the varying perspectives on masculinity and to this end I found the following text's helpful. Kay Hagan edited a collection of feminist authors concerns about the men's movement in general, but specifically addressed the Mythopoetic men's perspective, entitled Women Respond to the Men's Movement. Susan Faludi's Backlash also provided useful information about George Gilder, a recognised leader of the New

Traditionalists, and Warren Farrel (Men's Rights) and Robert Bly.

Other critiques that were useful were Florence Rush's essay "The Many Faces of the Backlash" and John Stoltenberg's essay "You Can't Fight Homophobia and Protect the Pornographers at the Same Time" both from The Sexual Liberals and the Attack on Feminism.

An early, and important, text of the Profeminist men's perspective is Jon Snodgrass' For Men Against Sexism and although many of the articles are over-personalised it represents an important starting point in the literature of the men's movement. The End of Manhood by John Stoltenberg also provides an interesting and insightful critique of masculinity from a Radical Profeminist perspective.

In researching other perspectives of the men's movement in the United States I relied mainly upon secondary sources. In particular Kenneth Clatterbaugh's excellent Contemporary perspectives on Masculinity was extremely helpful. Also useful was the abundance of work produced by Michael Kimmel in such books as Changing Men, Against the Tide and New Men New Minds.

I recognise that there may be groups who have different perspectives on masculinity who may not have published their ideas. This reflects, once again, the perception that masculinity is something which affects only white, middle-class, heterosexual men which the Gay Rights and Black Rights movements have successfully demonstrated is a

fallacy. That being conceded, the primary and secondary sources I have used represent at least the major perspectives on masculinity that are currently being articulated in America.

## CHAPTER III

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Theoretical Overview

The contemporary men's movement has been in existence for over twenty years now in the United States and in New Zealand. These movements are indebted to the contemporary women's movement for much of their theoretical understanding of gender. The quality of men's analysis of masculinity has been steadily improving over the years and is now reaching an acceptable level of complexity. However, there is still a large body of work that is characterised by an overemphasis of a therapeutic understanding of masculinity. Examples include Robert Bly's Iron John, John Rowan's The Horned God and Sam Keen's Fire In the Belly. The orientation of these books offers an unacceptably generalised construction of masculinity and fails to adequately explain the complex interaction between the individual, social structures and the wider culture.

My thesis re-orientes our understanding of masculinity by placing these complex interactions in the foreground of analysis and thus

highlights the centrality of these interactions to the construction of masculinity. Theories of phenomenological sociology and cultural hegemony underpin this framework. These orientations enrich this thesis and allow me to undertake a cultural analysis of masculinity that avoids the over-simplifications of a "self-help" style of analysis.

My reading therefore began with some very general edited collections such as Keith Thompson's To Be A Man which suggested that conceptualising masculinity as a monolithic phenomenon was an outdated mode of analysis. There are many differing constructions of masculinity, and Thompson's collection provides a varied collection of interpretations. However, most of the essays do not offer any analysis of structural influences.

Thompson's point is elaborated on in Michael Kimmel's edited collection, Changing Men. In his essay "Rethinking Masculinity" Kimmell argues that old role models have not yet been replaced by new ones which has created a tension in role expectations for men. He also suggests that gender is a relational construct and that, historically, changing definitions of masculinity have always been a response to changing definitions of femininity. However, Kimmel's essay focuses primarily on American<sup>4</sup> constructions of masculinity and also tends to

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<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this thesis the terms "America" "American" and the "United States" refer to the continental United States, its culture and its inhabitants. The terms "America" and the "United States" are used somewhat

minimise men's participation in constructing definitions of masculinity.

Kimmell's essay lead me to consult Peter Berger's The Sacred Canopy, and his collaborative work with Stanley Pullberg "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness", as well as Robert Wuthnow's Cultural Analysis which is a succinct précis of much of Berger's work. In these works Berger provides a theory of how culture is formed and maintained through the interaction of individuals. Berger's concepts of internalisation and externalisation helped to explain how and why men simultaneously accommodate and resist the dominant hegemonic order.

However Berger's theory did not adequately explain women's role in the hegemony. By doing this Berger minimises women's participation in constructing definitions of masculinity, something that Kimmell was careful to note in his essay, "Rethinking Masculinity." And although Berger provides a complex structural analysis of culture he renders women invisible by not accounting for women's important role in the maintenance and perpetuation of hegemonic structures.

T.J. Jackson Lears reviews the work of Antonio Gramsci in "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony" which offers a plausible explanation of women's role in the maintenance of social structures. Gramsci's

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interchangeably and merely reflect the loose popular usage of these terms by New Zealanders.

analysis of hegemony would suggest that women trade their "consent" to be oppressed in order to secure "benefits" from their oppressors.

### *Orientating the United States Perspective*

Having established a theoretical basis for further examination I consulted Kenneth Clatterbaugh's excellent Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity. Clatterbaugh describes and evaluates six different perspectives on masculinity that are current in the United States. Clatterbaugh succinctly situates each perspective within its historical and political context and evaluates each orientations agenda for change. Clatterbaugh's work is insightful and highly recommended, but is only focused on the United States. Clatterbaugh's inclusion of a Socialist men's perspective is problematic and I dispensed with this perspective in my thesis. There are no socialist organisations in the United States that are organised with masculinity as their primary reason for being. Socialists are concerned with how men and women, as workers, relate to capitalist structures and the relations of production. Socialist analysis clearly has implications that are pertinent to analyses of masculinity but, I suggest, cannot be considered as a perspective in their own right.



*Orientating the New Zealand Perspective*

As I was wanting to compare and contrast differing constructions of masculinity between New Zealand and the United States I needed to locate material that explained the cultural specificities of New Zealand men's construction of masculinity. I found that there was not an abundance of material available written by New Zealand men on the subject of masculinity. Material that was available tended to be therapeutically orientated such as Alan Marriott's The Prance of Men. Alan's book richly draws on his extensive experience in working with men and provides an insightful exploration of the socialisation process that men undergo. Although I identified with much of Alan's book I found the lack of a theoretical framework made it unsuitable for my purposes.

In fact I found the work of three New Zealand women to be more helpful because of the "raw data" that they presented. All three women interviewed New Zealand men and used their interviews to provide insight and understanding into how New Zealand men live their lives, and construct their personalised definitions of masculinity. These works are Alison Gray's The Jones Men, Sue Kedgley's The Sexual Wilderness and Gwendoline Smith's Will The Real Mr New Zealand Please Stand Up? Published between 1983-1990 these three works were

more widely focused than my thesis but helped to identify key assumptions and thus helped to focus my research.

### *Orientating the Feminist Perspective*

Susan Faludi's Backlash includes some criticism of the men's movement. However this criticism is, in general, based upon anecdotal evidence and is theoretically barren. Kay Leigh Hagan's edited collection, Women Respond to the Men's Movement is theoretically rich and provides a variety of insightful analyses of, in particular, the mythopoetic men's movement. Bel Hooks sounds the alarm bells for the men's movement in her essay "Men in Feminist Struggle" suggesting that the men's movement has increasingly shied away from political activism. Rosemary Radford Ruether reinforces this point in her essay "Patriarchy and the Men's Movement" arguing that men need to accept responsibility for their participation in the perpetuation of oppressive social structures. Most of the essays in this collection focus narrowly on the mythopoetic men's movement and thus miss a valuable opportunity to critique some of the other men's perspectives in the United States. The relevance of extensive critiques of the mythopoetics to the New Zealand men's movement must also be questioned due to this perspectives unpopularity in New Zealand.

In her essay "The Many Faces of the Backlash", Florence Rush suggests that men do not suffer from the effects of oppression and as such do not need to be liberated. I would suggest that Rush's analysis is incorrect because it renders invisible the effects of men's socialisation into the oppressor role.

## CHAPTER IV

### FIVE MEN'S MOVEMENT PERSPECTIVES

The men's movement in both the United States and New Zealand takes many forms. My thesis will primarily focus on five distinct perspectives within the movement as identified by Kenneth Clatterbaugh. All five perspectives are similar in both countries. The groups expounding these perspectives have experienced fluctuating membership over the years. They all, except for the New Traditionalists, seem to share the opinion that men are in some way emotionally deficient as a result of their social and cultural conditioning. From this basic agreement the different perspectives, in some cases drastically, part company.

The process of identifying various assumptions about masculinity in the United States is somewhat simplified by the function of scale. In the United States men who identify with one of the five perspectives will usually have a national organisation which they can join. In New Zealand this is not necessarily the case. Men organise on a local or regional basis and occasionally meet up for a national conference that may cover a variety of approaches to masculinity. Hence in the New

Zealand context, there is some overlapping of ideas and resources between the different perspectives.

This chapter will also critically examine the five perspectives of the men's movement. In this way I hope to show what current thinking about the men's movement has shown, and which perspectives offer the best hope for eliminating the harmful effects of patriarchy for women and men. The critiques I offer will by no means be exhaustive, but will rather give the reader an appreciation of the "flavour" of current thinking on each perspective.

### 1. *The New Traditionalist Perspective*

New Traditionalists believe that the ideal gender role for men dictates that men are ideally suited to be the providers and protectors of women and children. There are, as Kenneth Clatterbaugh identifies, two strands to this perspective of the men's movement; moral traditionalism and biological conservatism. Both strands believe that men are ideally suited to be the providers and protectors of women and children. The two strands of the New Traditionalist perspective perceive biology as the governing component in their construction of the gender ideal. In fact these two strands only differ in the emphasis that is placed upon biology as the determining factor in social relations

between men and women. Whereas the former believe biological factors to be a crucial determinant in social relations, the latter argue that although biology is a factor, moral considerations (usually referred to in the guise of a "natural order") are of greater significance in predetermining social relations.

Moral traditionalists subscribe to an essentialist view of human nature. In these terms human nature is comprised of certain "irreducible qualities", about which moral traditionalists are rarely, if ever, specific. The ambiguity caused by the reliance on such an abstract concept as "natural order" benefits moral traditionalists because of the flexibility that such a concept inherently allows. So, for example, moral traditionalists argue that the nuclear family is "natural" because it preserves the ideal of a two parent family. They also argue however that marriage is "unnatural" for men because it is a socially constructed arrangement that stifles men and as such runs contrary to the "natural order".

Moral traditionalists believe there is a close link between masculinity and the ability to economically provide for one's family. This economic definition of masculinity is seen as basic to human biology and is constructed by New Traditionalists as part of the gender role for men. The feminist movement comes in for criticism from moral traditionalists because they have undercut men twice "first,

directly, by encouraging women to work, and then, indirectly, by championing social welfare programmes that allow wives to survive without their husbands."<sup>1</sup> The feminist movement in these terms goes against the "natural order" of manhood as determined by "human biology."

The Promisekeepers, who are gaining an ever increasing membership, provide an excellent example of the orientation of New Traditionalists. The Promisekeepers are a Christian based organisation and as such their rhetoric tends to emphasise the moral strand of new traditionalism. They believe that the actions of individual men, informed by Promisekeepers ideology, will institute a social order that is more "natural".

In essence they seek to reinstate a hegemonic order that is patriarchal and hierarchical. Promisekeepers consider the gender ideal for men includes men being the head of the family, accepting responsibility for their family, and exercising control over its members. Significantly, they consider single mother families to be a social ill, whereas single father families are not.

Promisekeepers adhere to a set of seven promises which seek to confirm and reaffirm both their Christianity and their masculinity. They

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Faludi, Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992), p323.

promise "to honour Jesus Christ, have close male friends, practice spiritual, moral, and sexual purity, be faithful to wife and children, support the church, defy racial and denominational barriers and go out and encourage the world to do the same."<sup>2</sup> These promises are a further articulation of the gender ideal for men as constructed by the Promisekeepers.

Although the Promisekeepers were only formed recently, they have become remarkably popular in the United States. Formed in 1991 by ex-football coach Bill McCartney, the Promisekeepers regularly fill football stadiums with supporters. They estimated that by the end of 1995 that they would have over 500,000 members.<sup>3</sup>

In New Zealand there is no clearly defined New Traditionalist men's movement. However, in 1995 fourteen men from Auckland, including several ministers attended a Promisekeepers meeting in Atlanta, Georgia with the express idea of bringing Promisekeepers ideology back to New Zealand. More recently in 1996 the Promisekeepers held their first men-only mass meeting in Auckland. There was an estimated 2,000 men in attendance and more meetings are being planned.

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<sup>2</sup> Layrie Goodstein, "Saving Souls the Manly Way" from Washington Post reprinted in Guardian Weekly 4/6/95, p18.

<sup>3</sup> L. Goodstein, "Saving Souls the Manly Way", p18.



Evaluation of the New Traditionalist Perspective

Some moral traditionalists, such as Gilder, confuse the boundaries between the masculine stereotype and the gender role and ignore evidence which refutes their claims. George Gilder, a leading American moral traditionalist, has made much of the difference between socialised (married) and unsocialised (single) men. He claims that the gender role for single men includes a propensity towards violent crimes against women, such as rape and assault. The gender role for married men on the other hand is, according to Gilder, to protect and provide for women.

Feminist social science contends that such a position is misleading and that women are in fact at greater risk of rape or assault within the home when they are supposedly protected by married men. It can therefore be argued that Gilder's construction of the gender role for single and married men is in fact a stereotype of masculinity. Gilder takes a generalised conception of what the behaviours and attitudes of single and married men are thought to be, and interprets them as a universal standard of the masculine gender role. One can only conclude that moral traditionalists like Gilder, have themselves been misled or that they are guilty of trying to create a mythical picture of family life to suit their own agenda.

New Traditionalists also, somewhat conveniently, suggest biology as a justification for the patriarchy. Men as the breadwinner of the family unit are "naturally" inclined to be the head of the family - it is their ideal role. Their notion of the ideal gender role for men as head of a two parent family is based upon a quixotic stereotype of the gender role for men. Clearly this kind of thinking is an attempt to maintain unequal power relationships between men and women. It also explains why New Traditionalists feel threatened by the growing number of single mother families and women in the paid workforce. New Traditionalists clearly believe that men should exert power and control over women and they feel their power is being threatened by the growing independence of women.

## 2. The Profeminist Perspective

Informed by feminist analyses of culture, profeminists attribute social ills to the ways in which masculinity and patriarchy are constructed in society. As with the New Traditionalists, the Profeminist men's perspective also has two divisions; Liberal and Radical Profeminism. Each form of Profeminism is informed by the feminist analysis of gender to which they subscribe.

Liberal Profeminists conceptualise masculinity as a series of

limitations placed on men, in much the same way as femininity places restrictions on women. Liberal Profeminists maintain that

masculinity is a set of limitations that are imposed on men...[where] limited ways of behaving are encouraged by a system of rewards, punishments, and social stereotypes and ideals. Both men and women are prevented from self-realization by these restrictive roles.<sup>4</sup>

By defining masculinity in this way, Liberal Profeminists equate the masculine gender role as "a set of limitations that are imposed on men". The gender ideal of "self-realization" is unobtainable while men adhere to the rigid definition of the gender role proscribed by masculinity.

Radical Profeminists assert that apart from childbearing there are no discernible differences between men and women - gender differences are learned. In contrast to Liberal Profeminists, Radical Profeminists believe that masculinity

is created and maintained by misogyny and violence against women, and that patriarchy is the social and political order in which this masculinity exists.<sup>5</sup>

They reject the idea that men are oppressed and assert that masculinity is culturally produced under the system of patriarchy and that men benefit from the domination of women. Radical Profeminists construct the gender role for men as including "misogyny and violence against

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<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Clatterbaugh, Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity: Men, Women, and Politics in Modern Society, (Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, 1990), p10.

<sup>5</sup> K. Clatterbaugh, Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity, p10.

women". Patriarchy "is the social and political order" to which this inflexible definition of the masculine gender role can be attributed.

Radical Profeminists believe that any programmes for changing men must be vetted and supervised by feminist women as men are not capable of being critical of their own involvement in such programmes. For Radical Profeminist men, violence is the linchpin of patriarchy.

Violence against women is part of a continuum that includes actual violence, the threat of violence, put downs, manipulation and dismissals. As John Stoltenberg, a leading American Radical Profeminist, argues these are all things that "you'd only do to someone who didn't matter as much as you, someone you outrank."<sup>6</sup> Stoltenberg argues that the process of being socialised into the masculine role is a process of dis-identification with anything female.

The process that Stoltenberg describes can be seen to represent a stereotype of masculinity. It is a stereotype by virtue of the fact that it represents his view of the way in which men are socialised. To be considered a part of the gender role this process would need to be able to be observed and verified before it could be categorised as such.

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<sup>6</sup> John Stoltenberg, "The Profeminist Mens Movement: New Connections, New Directions", in Against The Tide: Profeminist men in the United States 1776-1990, ed's. Michael Kimmel & Thomas Mosmiller (Boston: Beacon, 1992), p468. From an Address presented at the 13th National Conference on Men and Masculinity, Seattle University, 8 July 1988. First Printed in Changing Men 28 (Winter/Spring 1989).

Men are trained to be constantly on guard against the encroachment of anything that could be vaguely construed as being feminine. "That's why so many men use violence against women - to act out through domination just how different from women men need to be to be men."<sup>7</sup> Although moral traditionalists would agree that violence against women is undesirable, the violence would be dismissed by claiming that it was part of men's inherent "nature" or that it was being perpetrated by single, unsocialised men. Non-heterosexual men would then, in this perspective, be conceived as being feminine in some respect. This negative image of masculinity defines what the gender role is not. Anything feminine cannot be a part of this traditional construction. It is the identification with the feminine that causes "real men" to oppress non-heterosexual men as inferior. Stoltenberg argues that it is a fear of being confused with the feminine, a fear of "contamination," that is a cornerstone of traditional masculinity.

Programmes that address men's violence in the US and New Zealand are good examples of the Liberal Profeminist position. Essentially these programmes challenge men to politicise their day to day interactions with the wider culture. In this way they simultaneously raise the consciousness of men and also help to change social reality, not

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<sup>7</sup> J. Stoltenberg, "The Profeminist Men's Movement", p469.

only for themselves but for all other humans with whom they come into contact.

Liberal Profeminists would view Stopping Violence programmes as "a step in the right direction," and would argue that as long as these programmes show results in reducing physically violent behaviour towards women that they are successful. Radical Profeminists on the other hand would be more likely to view these programmes with more scepticism. They would argue that although physical violence towards women may drop, other forms of violence such as emotional or verbal abuse may increase. And as long as the patriarchal structure remains intact then the long term effects of these programmes are not as great as Liberal Profeminists would like to suggest.

Interestingly, the proportion of voluntary participants in stopping violence programmes differs markedly between the two countries and suggests a different cultural orientation towards these programmes. In the United States the majority of participants are referred to these programmes by agencies.<sup>8</sup> However Ken, who has been extensively involved in stopping men's violence programmes for over fourteen years, notes that in New Zealand at least half of the participants voluntarily enrol.

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Allen & Paul Kivel, "Men Changing Men", Ms magazine, (Sept/Oct 1994), p51.

*Evaluation of the Profeminist Perspective*

The Radical Profeminist men's perspective, especially in its early writings such as Snodgrass's For Men Against Sexism, is characterised by what some believe to be an unhealthy subordination to feminism. Many of the articles in Snodgrass's book are indeed characterised by a strong sense of guilt and the need for men to bend over backwards, and then bend over backwards again, to accommodate feminism. Turning somersaults is not seen by Profeminist critics as a strong position from which to confront patriarchy.

Acceding to the wishes of feminism can be construed as another negative image of men's gender role. Many traditional constructions of the gender role extol the virtue of masculine strength. To agree to the wishes of feminism could therefore be seen as a sign of weakness, or of femininity which, as we have seen before, is not part of the gender role which Profeminist men reject.

Radical Profeminist men suggest that once men have gained a feminist consciousness and awareness of gender issues that they should politicize their day to day interactions with their culture. They believe it is possible to dismantle patriarchy. Their ideal of the new gender role for men emphasises the part that men can play in establishing a social order that emphasises equality and respect for all humans. The first step

in this process is to raise the consciousness of men and to thereby challenge the masculine gender role which renders gender injustices invisible to the eyes of men.

Both strands of Profeminism acknowledge that men benefit from the way that masculinity is constructed under the system of patriarchy. However Radical Profeminists believe that any attempts by men to challenge patriarchy must be informed by a radical feminist analysis and supervised by radical feminist women. Radical Profeminists construct men as unable to be critical enough of their own motives and actions. Radical Profeminists fear that "unradical" men may inadvertently collude with the system of patriarchy rather than attempting to dismantle it. Liberal Profeminists on the other hand do not have such a critical opinion of men and conceive that it is possible for men to be allies with feminists in a common struggle to dismantle patriarchy.

Critics of the Profeminist perspective note that the American Profeminist organisation, the National Organisation for Changing Men (NOCM), has failed to attract widespread and lasting support from men. NOCM's widespread lack of support can be substantially explained by its failure to develop a feminism that is masculine identified. Developing an analysis that compliments feminist ideology without rejecting feminism outright, remains a challenge for Profeminist men.



### 3. The Men's Rights Perspective

Men's Rights ideology is based upon the premise that men's privilege and power is a myth. Warren Farrell, now internationally recognised as a leader of Men's Rights activists, was once an ardent supporter of the women's movement in the 1970s. He wrote The Liberated Man in this period and argued that feminism would also free men

from the economic burden of supporting a family alone and from the physical and mental strain of constantly proving masculinity and repressing 'feminine' emotions.<sup>9</sup>

Farrell was a celebrated icon of feminism but his enthusiasm faded in the early 1980s. In 1984 he published a new book which signalled his changed viewpoint, The Myth of Male Power.

Men's Rights advocates believe that the gender roles for men and women are too restrictive. They would like to see, for example, women serving in combat roles in the military and men providing primary care for children. They insist that traditional gender roles do not give either men or women the right to choose what to do with their lives.

Men's Rights activists also believe that feminism has "gone too far" and they lobby government to change "anti-male" legislation. Their agenda includes such issues as gaining equality in child custody cases,

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<sup>9</sup> S. Faludi, Backlash, p336.

reverse discrimination court cases, and false accusations of rape and/or child abuse. They too believe that men need to engage in consciousness raising but unlike Profeminist men they believe that the gender injustices are being committed by feminists against men. They argue that patriarchy does not need to be dismantled but merely restructured.

### *Evaluation of the Men's Rights Perspective*

Men's Rights advocates, such as Farrell, have been criticised for their position on liberation. Men's Rights advocates maintain that human liberation is the ultimate goal for humanity because all liberation movements are equally important. Florence Rush argues that the Men's Rights position on liberation denies a hierarchy of oppressions. She argues that men have never been oppressed and as such "[t]he concept of male liberation has no basis in history."<sup>10</sup> As is becoming increasingly clear to liberation movement leaders, arguing over who is more oppressed diverts energy away from fighting the oppression and as such is not useful.

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<sup>10</sup> Florence Rush, "The Many Faces of the Backlash", in The Sexual Liberals and the Attack on Feminism, ed's. Dorchen Leidholdt & Janice G. Raymond (New York: Pergammon Press, 1990), p167.

Due to the rhetoric of some of the American Men's Rights leaders this perspective has been labelled as extremist. For instance Richard Doyle, founder of the Men's Rights Association, believes that feminists are "shrews aspiring to invade male sanctuaries".<sup>11</sup> However other American Men's Rights leaders such as Herb Goldberg, Richard Haddad and Warren Farrell appear to be more concerned with true equality between the sexes. They do not hold women accountable, although they do blame feminism, for the inequalities they perceive.

The extremist rhetoric of some Men's Rights advocates such as Richard Doyle and Fred Hayward in the United States and Peter Zohrab in New Zealand, has had the effect of labelling the whole Men's Rights perspective as being a backlash against feminism. Confusion about the Men's Rights perspective is exacerbated by the trend of some Men's Rights advocates to confound the terms "woman" and "feminist". Despite this confusion, Men's Rights advocates claim that they favour equality and liberation from traditional roles for both men and women. They believe that through law changes they can facilitate a transformation of the gender role for men.

In New Zealand, as in the United States, those who support the Men's Rights perspective may have a tendency to feel that feminism has

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Doyle, The Rape of the Male, (St. Paul, Minn.: Poor Richard's Press, 1976), p175.

"gone too far." For instance the New Zealand Men's Rights Association (NZMRA) manifesto contains statements such as the following:

"Women's Studies departments offer pseudo-academic courses in man-hating."

"The Ministry of Women's Affairs is just a Feminist propaganda-house."

"Feminism has captured the legal system to the detriment of men."<sup>12</sup>

The NZMRA manifesto articulates some of the concerns of the Men's Rights perspective but often does this with little precision. The use of highly emotive language such as "man-hating" is evident throughout the manifesto which also seems to conflate the terms "woman" and "feminist." This manifesto makes various claims and arguments which are very frequently unsubstantiated by any form of empirical evidence. Despite the fact that official membership in the NZMRA is very low some of my interviewees suggest that there is an undercurrent of support for the Men's Rights perspective in New Zealand.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Obtained via e-mail from Peter Zohrab, secretary of the NZMRA, "zohrab\_p@actrix.gen.nz".

<sup>13</sup> In an interview with Kim Hill on National Radio on 6/3/96 Peter Zohrab, secretary of the NZMRA, put the NZMRA membership at around six.

#### 4. *The Mythopoetic and Spiritual Perspectives*

Mythopoetics argue that their activities emphasise mutuality, respect and cooperation and are helpful in breaking down hierarchies. Like the Men's Rights and Profeminist perspectives, the Mythopoetics accept that men's gender role under patriarchy limits men's life choices. However, Mythopoetics and Spiritualists concede that challenging political structures is not high on their agenda. Mythopoetic and Men's Rights exponents both share a characteristic anti-women orientation. Mythopoetic leaders blame women for the "crisis of masculinity" they believe men are currently experiencing.

Robert Bly, a recognised leader of the Mythopoetics constructs men as being stereotypically "soft." Mythopoetics suggest that at the core of this stereotype of men's gender role is repressed anger, a lack of direction and a state of disconnectedness from positive animal instincts. They further suggest that this situation has come about as a result of young men being initiated into manhood by women which prevents the development of a normal male psyche. For Mythopoetics proper initiation for young men is an ideal that can only be achieved when young men are initiated by older men.

Bly regards single mothers as doubly problematic because firstly they raise sons that are only interested in pleasing women, and secondly

the boys develop without men as role models. In fact Bly blames women for the problems that men are facing today. In his words "There's a disease going around, and women have been spreading it."<sup>14</sup> Bly's comment attributes men's gender role behaviours to a process of socialisation dominated by women. He constructs this type of socialisation as a "disease" that "women have been spreading" and thereby relieves men of any responsibility that they have in this process.

His comment can also be interpreted as a validation of the "victim" status of men and bears a striking resemblance to Men's Rights ideology. His comment is a cause of concern amongst Radical Profeminists because when men validate their status as "victim" they tend to do so by invalidating women's status as "victims." This process of invalidation ignores the effects that patriarchy has on the daily lives of women.

Criticism of the methods of the Mythopoetic perspective centre upon the use of archetypal imagery in such books as Iron John. As Michael Kimmel commented on a 1993 Donahue show devoted to the Mythopoetic men's perspective, "What we need is more Ironing Johns, not Iron Johns!"<sup>15</sup> His comment reflects feminist concern about the reproduction of patriarchal values and gender role stereotypes through

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<sup>14</sup> S. Faludi, Backlash, p345.

<sup>15</sup> TV3, "The Donahue Show," 27 August 1993, "Women Respond to the Men's Movement."

the use of archetypal imagery and fairy stories that this perspective favours.

In the United States the Mythopoetic perspective has taken steps to rectify their public image. They claim they have been misunderstood and that the rituals and methods they use have been analyzed out of context. Michael Schwalbe's recent book Unlocking the Iron Cage deals extensively with these issues. Despite attempts to revitalise their image, the Mythopoetic movement has had a declining number of participants since it reached its peak around 1991. At this time there were estimated to be 100,000 men who had participated in Mythopoetic work in the United States.<sup>16</sup> More recent figures are unavailable.

The Spiritual perspective is exemplified by the writing of John Rowan. Rowan was influenced by the spiritual feminism of Starhawk, who is a witch in the Wicca tradition. Rowan teaches in the Wicca tradition and advocates goddess worship as a way of reuniting men with a feminine understanding of themselves. In contrast to the Mythopoetics, Rowan's Spiritual perspective encourages young men to be initiated into manhood by women. But like the Mythopoetics,

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Schwalbe, Unlocking the Iron Cage: The Men's Movement, Gender Politics, and American Culture, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p4 and p247 note 1. Schwalbe notes that "the 100,000 figure was often cited but was not based on any systematic study. The figure seems plausible however, considering the hundreds of men's events, most with some mythopoetic content, held annually across the country from the mid-1980s onward."

Spiritualists are not concerned with directly challenging social structures. Rather they are interested in transforming the individual into a more openly respectful and spiritually aware human.

Rowan, unlike Bly, is openly Profeminist in his approach to men's spirituality. Sexism is seen as a distortion of the Wicca tradition which centres upon a form of pagan Goddess worship. The Horned God, symbolising the ideal of positive masculinity, must serve the Goddess to ensure that patriarchy, once destroyed, shall never return. Like both radical and Liberal Profeminists, Rowan finds insight and leadership from feminism. He also believes, unlike Bly, that women are ideally suited to initiate men into this spiritual journey.

### *Evaluation of the Mythopoetic and Spiritual Perspectives*

There has been extensive criticism of the Mythopoetics in America and a large percentage of this criticism comes from the feminist movement and seems to be, in part, a response to the disproportionate amount of media attention that this perspective has received.

Bel Hooks argues that Bly's Iron John is politically bankrupt. She suggests that it releases men from confronting their own sexism and that as such men run the risk of simply reflecting patriarchy rather than



dismantling it.<sup>17</sup> She believes that the weekend workshops for men held by the Mythopoetic movement are simply another form of homosocial bonding. As homosocial bonding

albeit on different terms, is promoted and affirmed constantly in this society. Should a men's movement exist that is primarily concerned with intensifying male interest and pleasure in homosocial bonding?<sup>18</sup>

Mythopoetics would argue that it is precisely those "different terms" that make all the difference. Mythopoetics argue that they do not engage in traditional forms of homosocial bonding which emphasise gender role stereotypes such as exclusivity, hierarchy and dominance.

Both Bly and Rowan utilise principles of Jungian psychology but seem reluctant to accept Jung's conservatism. Jung suggests that when either men or women explore their collective archetypes that what they will find is conservative behaviour. Neither Bly nor Rowan explain how men, conceived as a set of archetypes, interact with social structures. It seems that they do not see archetypes as determining gender role behaviours and are thus able to escape Jung's deterministic conservatism. However they also fail to explain exactly to what extent, or even how, archetypes affect the gender role for men.

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<sup>17</sup> Bel Hooks, "Men in Feminist Struggle - The Necessary Movement", in Women Respond to the Men's Movement, ed. Kay Hagan (San Francisco: Pandora, 1992), p112.

<sup>18</sup> B. Hooks, "Men in Feminist Struggle", p115.

Bly and Rowan would respond to this criticism by arguing that it does not matter how or why archetypes work. For them it is simply enough that they do work, that men can take some positive meaning from them. But Bly's and Rowan's definition of "positive meaning" disagree. John Rowan is critical of Bly's wildman workshops arguing that "for unreconstructed male chauvinists, the wildman is simply an invitation to be even more aggressive."<sup>19</sup> Rather than altering the gender role, Rowan believes that Bly's wildman workshops reinforce gender role attributes like aggressiveness. Rowan thus negatively characterises the ideal gender role as unaggressive.

Bly's work has also been criticised for emphasising the need for men to connect with other men, especially their fathers. As Gloria Steinem points out, this emphasis ignores the desirability of men connecting with their mothers.<sup>20</sup> By de-emphasising the need for men to connect with women Bly's desire to see men connect with each other can be construed as a defence of male bonding. John Stoltenberg argues that male bonding is concerned with emphasising differences and hierarchies in his following definition.

Male bonding is institutionalized learned behavior whereby men recognize and reinforce one another's bona fide membership in the

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<sup>19</sup> John Rowan, The Horned God: Feminism and Men as Wounding and Healing, (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p111.

<sup>20</sup> Gloria Steinem, The Revolution From Within: A Book Of Self-Esteem, (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), pp278-279.

male gender class and whereby men remind one another that they were not born women.<sup>21</sup>

Male bonding is viewed as undesirable because it emphasises hierarchies over others while simultaneously promoting mutuality in that hierarchical position. Thus male bonding promotes a narrow view of the gendered world for men.

In the New Zealand context the men that I interviewed were generally critical of the Mythopoetic perspective. The preponderance of the Mythopoetics sanctioning of male bonding was noted. Mike, who has run work orientated courses for men, believes that

Robert Bly's henchmen have fallen over...retreating into the forest. I think that's to do with male bonding which is absolutely false.

Mike believes that the closeness and sense of mutuality that men may gain from Mythopoetical work is "absolutely false." He believes that "retreating into the forest" is merely an exercise in "male bonding". In this way "Robert Bly's henchmen have fallen over" because their work does not challenge the premise of "male bonding". My interviewees concluded that this perspective had outlived its usefulness in New Zealand.

Both the Spiritualists and Mythopoetics emphasise personal transformation, but seem to have little or no commitment to overtly

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<sup>21</sup> J. Stoltenberg, "Toward Gender Justice" in For Men Against Sexism, ed. Jon Snodgrass (Albion, California: Times Change Press, 1977), p75.

challenging political or social structures. My interviewees suggest that most men in New Zealand have rejected these perspectives as an inappropriate way of confronting men's issues.

### 5. *The Group Specific Perspective*

There are two group specific perspectives which are deserving of mention, namely the Gay Rights movement and the Black Rights movement. Both of these movements have larger concerns than how masculinity is constructed, but both groups have been important for the contribution that each has made to standardised discussions of masculinity.

Each has challenged the predominance of white, middle-class, heterosexual leaders and authors who have traditionally constructed and defined masculinity. The construction of a taken-for-granted universality that standard discussions of masculinity have in the past encouraged, in part reflects the privileged status and power relations of white middle-class heterosexual leaders and authors. The visibility of white middle-class masculinity in the media and education, for example, renders invisible men who do not fit this description by sheer hegemonic pressure. The Gay Rights and Black Rights perspective on masculinity offer alternative explanations and evaluations of masculinity as well as

offering alternative agendas for change.

In the United States the approach to African-American masculinity inevitably emphasises the impact of racism and poverty.

African-American men are continually confronted by racist stereotypes of African-American masculinity which often have little to do with the gender role for African-American men. African-American men find themselves in a double bind due to the contradiction between their opportunities in a racist society and the (white) expectations of masculinity towards which they are expected to strive.

African-American men are expected to economically provide for their family within an economic system that gives them little chance of actually achieving this expectation.

The situation for Maori men in New Zealand is, perhaps not surprisingly, very similar to African-American men in America. Maori men find themselves in the same double bind and still suffer from the effects of New Zealand's colonial past. But the voice of Maori men on the issue of the men's movement has yet to be articulated.

The visibility of the contemporary Gay Liberation movement in the United States began with the Stonewall Riot in Greenwich Village in 1968. The movement was committed to decriminalising homosexual relationships and securing civil rights for gays and lesbians. Significantly they also sought to bring about an end to traditional sex

roles for men and women.

Since that time many American gay men have joined the National Organisation for Changing Men (NOCM), a Profeminist men's organisation. They seem to participate in this organisation because of the centrality that NOCM places on homophobia as a maintaining cause of masculinity. Gay men also have common interests with Profeminist men such as issues like violence against women, patriarchal privilege, and fathering. NOCM is also seen as a place where gay men can have an impact upon heterocentric assumptions about masculine identity.

Although NOCM purports to be acting in the interests of both gay and straight men it appears that gay men have not established their political agenda within NOCM. Similarly the Men's Rights perspective also acknowledges the importance of homophobia in traditional constructions of masculinity. However, once again, the gay agenda has not been taken up by Men's Rights activists because it is not seen as politically expedient to do so.

In New Zealand Gay Rights activists have been active for many years and perhaps two of the most recent significant achievements would be the passing of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill in 1981 and the launch of a regional television programme, "Express", dealing with issues of interest to gay, and gay friendly, people. Despite these significant achievements gay people are still marginalised in New

Zealand society. As such the contribution of their voice to current discourses of masculinity has been minimised.

## CHAPTER V

### THE NEW ZEALAND MEN'S MOVEMENT: A CROSS CULTURAL ANALYSIS

In the previous chapter I have outlined the major perspectives on masculinity that are currently enjoying favour in the men's movement in New Zealand and the United States. I have also provided a framework which structures the differing perspectives and highlights similarities and differences between the perspectives and between the two cultures.

Initially when I conceived my research project I thought that I would find an assortment of New Zealand men whose approach to their work with men would reflect the diversity of perspectives on masculinity. My assumption was based on the idea that as there was a diversity of theories about masculinity that these theories would be somewhat equitably represented. As it turned out nine of the ten men that I interviewed had similar viewpoints. All ten men were what I would label Profeminist. The only man who was different, a counsellor and psychotherapist, amalgamated this Profeminist perspective with that of the Mythopoetics, and only because, it seems, that he found the Mythopoetics appealing from a psychological point of view.



Having conducted the interviews this does not seem so surprising in retrospect. For what I found was that many of the men that I interviewed were familiar with each other. Upon looking further at the interconnectedness of the interviewees I found that at least four of the men were all members in the same informal men's support groups established at varying times from the late 1970s right through the 1980s. It seems also that as one man commented the groups never expanded their numbers they merely exchanged members from time to time as one group became the "in group."

This interconnectedness helps to explain the similarity in viewpoints expressed by the interviewees. There seems to be a basic shared knowledge that each man has. And although some of the men differ quite markedly in how they believe men's lives can be made better they used differing approaches in the way that they worked with men in Christchurch.

For instance, all ten men generally agreed that women were responsible for initiating a dialogue regarding issues of gender politics. All ten men identified the catalyst that spurred men on to change was usually a crisis of some kind, whether it was separation or divorce, redundancy or unemployment, or being threatened with court action. In these terms change was seen as a painful process for men. One can therefore draw the tentative conclusion that generally men still seem to

be *reacting to* rather than *enacting* movement within the field of gender relations. Despite this, the interviewees believed that the general population of men is now more aware of gender issues than perhaps twenty or thirty years ago.

It is true that there are many men's support groups around New Zealand. Some are informal and involve men who know each other getting together for meetings. Others are open to the public, such as Mensline in Christchurch. Each main city and some of the smaller cities have support groups currently running. There are national organisations such as the National Network of Stopping Violence Services and an annual conference - the Men's Leadership Gathering. On the regional level there are agencies, such as STOP in Christchurch, for sexual abusers, and other support services such as Essentially Men based in Auckland that work specifically with men or have developed programmes that attend to the special needs of men. A constant theme throughout all the courses and programmes and groups is change and growth. Before we can examine how constructions of masculinity are changing we need to understand how masculinity is constructed at present. This will also necessitate examining what prevents different constructions of masculinity from being adopted.

## 1. How do White Men in New Zealand Society Construct Masculinity?

As defined by Kenneth Clatterbaugh the gender role describes the behaviours and attitudes that other people, including men, could observe men exhibiting. The stereotype describes how people think men behave. The gender ideal is what people think the gender role for men should be. In this chapter my interviewees articulate the ways in which men internalise both the gender role and the stereotype of masculinity. In section (c) they suggest what the gender ideal could be and highlight some of the ways in which men resist more traditional constructions of masculinity. By comparing the gender role and stereotype of masculinity with the gender ideal my interviewees highlight the internal conflicts that men experience as they construct their own sense of masculinity.

### (A) The Masculine Gender Role

My interviewees identified several areas where the gender role for men is evident. Among these were the way that men come to identify themselves with their work, the lack of emotional expression that men show and sexist attitudes that men have towards women. All of these behaviours and attitudes have been observed by my interviewees and

comprise parts of the gender role.

Richard Stewart runs workshops for men as well as having over fourteen years of counselling experience. He suggests the masculine gender role includes "the put downs of women and the regarding of women as sexual objects" which he believes are all part of being a traditional "kiwi bloke". He believes this kind of behaviour was learned by men through, among other influences, role models such as "Robert Muldoon and the leaders of business...and armed forces people and rugby heroes."<sup>1</sup> Richard suggests that learning the behaviour modelled by such men encourages men to, among other things, behave in a sexist manner towards women. So for white men in New Zealand being a "kiwi bloke" entails putting women down and regarding women as sexual objects. These behaviours can be learned by young men through observation of the behaviour of older men.

Harold identified men's reluctance to attend courses that he runs on sex and sexuality. Men were curious about these courses but were anxious that they would not have to get up and "bare their soul" to the group. This fear or anxiety of "being exposed in some way" is a fear of being seen to be unmanly. Discussing emotions was seen as "unmanly" and thus represents a negative image of a "real man."

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Muldoon was Prime Minister of New Zealand from 1975-1984.

Ken also found that some men were reluctant to attend the stopping violence programme that he runs. He attributed the reluctance of men to come on the course to "the kind of attitude 'I can do it by myself'". Men treasure their ingenuity and resourcefulness and are reluctant to admit that they need help. To ask for help is seen as a weakness and a clear signal that you are "unmanly."

Alan has run "The Male System" course at the local polytechnic since 1982 and also has his own private counselling practice. He identified homophobia as another aspect of the masculine gender role that required special attention for the content of his course to run successfully. Men are often irrationally afraid of intimacy with other men for fear of being labelled homosexual. To a "kiwi bloke" this would place you on the farthest outskirts of a universe that is centred around heterosexual men.

The variables that my interviewees have identified here are significant because they illustrate some of the ways in which men who subscribe to traditional notions of masculinity behave. To summarise, they may: (a) regard women as sexual objects; (b) be reluctant to explore alternative ways of being a man lest they be judged or exposed as being "unmanly"; (c) believe that "being a man" entails isolating yourself and handling life on your own; (d) fear being intimate with other men.

These variables lock men into rigid ways of behaving so that they can identify themselves, and be identified by others, as "real men."

Striving to be "manly" reveals the constant battle that men must engage in to maintain and exercise masculine behaviour. To explore different ways of behaving is to be labelled as "unmanly." The consequence of being labelled as "unmanly" is to be disenfranchised from the power base of patriarchal society.

(B) *The Stereotype of Masculinity*

The stereotype of masculinity represents what other people, including men themselves, think the masculine gender role entails. The stereotype labels all men in the same way, regardless of how individual men may behave. Some men may actually display certain behaviours and some may not. The difference between the gender role and the stereotype is therefore a difference of perception of behaviour versus actual observation of behaviour.

Mark, a facilitator at Mensline, describes the stereotype for men that he grew up with as

not feeling, big boy's don't cry, being macho, strong, virile, successful at most things and really externalising anything that happens.

He added later that the stereotype also includes being task and/or image

orientated. The qualities that Mark describes again illustrate how men are confined to rigid patterns of behaviour based on these stereotyped images.

George, after 35 years of counselling experience, has come to the conclusion that the emotionally inexpressive man is the expected public persona and is "the common male figure in society". His perception of the behaviour of men includes this stereotype of emotional inexpression. Emotional expression is seen as a sign of weakness or of being out of control. Unsurprisingly then, George also suggests there is a clear link between emotional inexpression and control.

Men don't sit easily with not being in control, that's our whole socialisation, to be in charge, never let yourself be seen to be weak.

The stereotype of emotional inexpression is seen as a desirable quality that indicates strength, power and control. George suggests that men are socialised to conform to the stereotype of being "in charge". It is as a result of their socialisation that men are emotionally inexpressive. Emotional inexpression can therefore be explained by the desire for control toward which men have been socialised to strive.

The stereotypes identified in this section also reflect a definition of masculinity that is traditional and "manly." Perhaps the most significant variable is the need for men to be in control of themselves and others.

If we return to Gramsci's ideas about cultural hegemony we will

remember that hegemonic domination entails oppression with the consent of the oppressed. However the oppressed are never completely "won-over" which results in a continuous stream of challenges to the dominant interpretation of the status quo.

What I wish to suggest is that the cost to men of maintaining this role are significantly higher than may have been previously imagined. If men are socialised into being "providers" then they require certain attributes to be successful providers. These attributes are socially learned as stereotypes and limit men's human potential. The cost to others is also high as men simultaneously strive to maintain their position of power over those "others."

(C) *The Gender Ideal*

The gender ideal represents what people think the gender role for men should be, or should include. All the men I interviewed held similar ideas, informed by the Profeminist perspective, about the behaviours and attitudes that the "ideal man" should have. They all agreed on the need for men to be emotionally open to both women and other men in order to reach the ideal.

Alan who runs a course for men at the local polytechnic was clear that the gender ideal should include developing ways that men could be



"a lot more emotionally intimate in our relationships both with men and women." If men can learn to be "a lot more emotionally intimate" then they will be more capable of having relationships with men and women that are based upon equality and respect.

Tony, a Mensline facilitator for over three years, wanted both to support other men and to be supported by them and to help "men to find ways to change their own lives." Tony recognises that there are no universal solutions. As such, men need to support each other as they endeavour to find their own solutions and "change their own lives."

Tony also thought that it would be helpful for men to be

brought up in a way that's encouraging of who they are as a person and to learn how to communicate feelings and express themselves in a sensitive and respectful way.

In these terms Tony believes that if men are raised in the way he describes, society will benefit by having more open lines of communication between men and women. Men will also be generally more "respectful" towards women, as well as other men.

George, an experienced counsellor, agreed with Tony suggesting that a man should be "strong in his ability to be open, communicative." My interviewees construct a man's strength in relation to his ability "to be open, communicative" and to express himself "in a sensitive and respectful way." Their conceptualisation of the gender ideal for men signifies their desire to see human relationships redefined in terms of

mutuality, cooperation and equality.

## 2. *How is the Hegemonic Structure Which Enshrines*

### *Masculinity Sustained or Maintained?*

In essence the men's movement seeks to alter or challenge the prevailing hegemonic order that places men in a dominant position over women. The task of altering that order is difficult because men not involved with the men's movement remain unconvinced that there are any real benefits to giving up their power. The inability of the men's movement to "sell" the benefits of change to the public at large are influenced by the following factors that my interviewees identified.

(i) Men's groups are not overtly challenging political structures or educating the public at large about gender issues. Tony, a Mensline facilitator, conceded that Mensline is not "out there politically challenging patriarchal structures." By choosing not to challenge social structures Mensline, as a part of the New Zealand men's movement, is avoiding its responsibility to ensure that the changes to society, that they claim to support, are implemented.

Alan was critical of the men's movement for not seizing opportunities to challenge public attitudes to gender issues. He surmised that some groups within the movement appear to be more concerned

with presenting "a public profile that's acceptable" in order to maintain their sources of funding. Alan suggests that the men's movement has compromised its ideals by becoming preoccupied with securing sources of funding. As such, challenges to social structures which the men's movement supports have also become compromised.

By not educating the public and directly challenging patriarchy the men's movement suffers a consequential lack of growth which limits their potential to change society. Their lack of commitment to overtly challenging social structures maintains the status quo by default. There may also be leadership problems within the men's movement that are contributing to this lack of commitment.

(ii) Men may respond to women's increasing equality with a backlash or entrenchment. Resistance to women's progress illustrates the desire of some men to maintain the status quo and to maintain unequal power relationships between men and women.

Ken talked about the historical situation wherein whenever women seem to make some progress towards equality with men, men respond with a backlash. In New Zealand the backlash may take the form of entrenchment as in the case of equal pay legislation. Some men perceive women's increasing equality with men as a threat to their dominance. These men believe that their rightful place is in the hegemony that oppresses women. They suggest that women do not want

equality with men but rather they want to usurp men. Hence they believe that for men, there could not possibly be any positive benefits to equality. Once again this belief seems to reflect the inability of men's movement leaders to sell the benefits of changing away from a traditional definition of masculinity to men in general.

(iii) The media is identified as a socialising agent that reinforces traditional constructions of gender. George believes that television influences children's ideas so that "before those kids even get to school they know that men count and women don't." George suggests that television influences socialisation by providing children with stereotyped images of men's and women's gender role behaviours. In these terms television is seen as an institutional apparatus that helps to maintain traditional gender roles for men and women as well as reinforcing stereotypes.

There has been considerable ongoing debate about the influence of media on gender roles. A correlation between gender representation in media and gender roles in the real world is difficult to prove. However the belief that media does influence behaviour is not uncommon.<sup>2</sup>

(iv) Sexism is still prevalent, although now more covert. The sexual objectification of women that Richard described earlier in this chapter

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<sup>2</sup> For a review of current studies of gender representation on television I recommend Barrie Gunter's Television and Gender Representation, (London: John Libbey, 1995).

serves a purpose in traditional constructions of masculinity. By viewing women as sexual objects for the use of men, women are constructed as less important than men.

(v) For many men, violence is viewed as a way of solving problems. Sexual, physical and emotional violence is used by men who wish to exert their power and control over women and other men.

These five variables illustrate the ways that men maintain the status quo by clinging to outmoded ways of behaving which are based on more traditional constructions of masculinity. Those men that are aware of alternatives expose the tensions inherent in both accommodating and resisting the mandates of masculinity. Their effectiveness as agents of social change is limited as they question but do not directly challenge the institutions that uphold their own power.

### *American Influences on the New Zealand Men's Movement*

Of the ten men that I interviewed all agreed that the American men's movement had had some degree of influence upon the men's movement in New Zealand. Most of the men argued that this influence was not always a positive one and there was a general feeling that the ideas that were coming from America needed to be carefully evaluated before being implemented in New Zealand.

Alan teaches a course for men at the local polytechnic and states that overall the American men's movement in the early 1980s "had no influence on me at all." He explains that "the early drive for me here, and I think some of the other men too, came out of our own issues, our own society." He found much of the American material

totally pretentious. It did not deal with the structural stuff, it did not deal with the long term abuse and violence stuff, and I got quite put off by much of it.

In this way Alan constructs the American men's movement as having little relevance to New Zealand conditions. American analysis in the past has tended to be narrowly focused on micro-sociological problems, such as how men internalise value systems, while ignoring the macro-sociological analysis of "structural stuff" and "long term abuse and violence stuff". Because of these omissions Alan perceives the American men's movement of the early 1990s as being "several years behind what was happening here." Alan reached this conclusion because of his perception that the American men's movement has failed to account for masculinity as a structural influence in society.

Alan's observations suggest that the early American men's movement, by failing to account for the social and structural influences on masculinity, limited the effectiveness of their efforts to achieve social change. He suggests that the analysis of masculinity offered by the New Zealand men's movement grappled with the personal and structural

implications of masculinity. As such the New Zealand analysis was necessarily more complex and more effective at identifying causal factors within the social structure.

(a) *The New Traditionalist Influence*

Mike who has run work oriented courses for men was critical of the American influence on New Zealand. He believed that the values espoused by the Mythopoeists and New Traditionalists in particular, could be "just an entrapment back into the old way." The "old way" for Mike is a more traditional construction of masculinity that seeks to preserve hierarchical relationships between men and women. He is

concerned about the conservativeness that comes across from the United States masquerading as progress. I mean definitely the stuff that runs with the disguise of religion.

Mike identifies conservatism as undesirable and defines it as "the stuff that runs with the disguise of religion." The conservative influence is undesirable because it allows men an easy escape - the "old way" - from the minefield of gender relations. He thus draws a clear connection between religiously informed constructions of masculinity, such as the Promisekeepers, and the "old way" of the conservative New Traditionalists.

Mike suggests that some of the American men's movement perspectives are merely interested in maintaining their power and privilege. The importation of these ideals to New Zealand was undesirable because men may see it as an opportunity to claim "victim" status and to ignore their power and privilege. Moreover this "old way" encourages men to ignore their responsibility to challenge the very structures that uphold men's power in society.

Mike also questioned the need for American material in New Zealand. He states that he does not

like a lot of the stuff I see coming from the States...I'm not convinced that the American leadership is more astute or balanced than our own.

Mike thus concedes that the New Zealand men's movement has been influenced by American ideas. However this influence may not be a positive one because the American leaders may not be "more astute or balanced" than New Zealand leaders.

As Alan noted earlier in this section, the early analysis of the American men's movement lagged several years behind New Zealand. American analyses are grounded in their culture and reflect the political, historical and cultural specificities of that country. Therefore some aspects of American analysis will not apply to the cultural peculiarities of New Zealand, and they should not be expected to do so. I suggest that this is why Mike remains unconvinced that "the American



leadership is more astute".

(b) *The Men's Rights Influence*

The Men's Rights perspective has great appeal with disgruntled men who feel that they have received a "raw deal" from women. This perspective encourages men to externalise their responsibility and to blame others, usually women, for their own problems. Tony, a Mensline facilitator, believes that Warren Farrel, as a leading Men's Rights spokesperson has actively fostered the belief

that men have actually had a hard deal from women...I think that's where Warren Farrel actually falls down. He doesn't actually realise that men are probably more perpetrators. Even though it is important to work with the victim side of men. The hazard I see is that men will actually hook into this and say 'Oh, I'm a victim' and actually neglect their perpetrator side, and actually feel sorry for themselves and have a lot of anger toward women. Which is just recycling the old political game really. So I don't see that as being really helpful.

Tony argues that Farrell has failed to recognise that rather than receiving a "hard deal from women...men are probably more perpetrators" against women. Some men may accept the rhetoric of the Men's Rights perspective as a licence to "neglect their perpetrator side...feel sorry for themselves and have a lot of anger toward women".

Tony suggests that men may internalise Farrell's message to legitimate their status as "victims". The Men's Rights message

encourages men to construct an objective reality based upon this premise. By legitimising men's "victim" status, Men's Rights ideology constructs a personal sense of order for men that ignores men's culpability in the formation of that reality. By ignoring their participation in the process of defining reality Men's Rights patrons are "just recycling the old political game really."

(c) *The Mythopoetic Influence*

All the men I interviewed expressed reservations about the Mythopoetic perspective which is led by gurus such as Robert Bly, Shepard Bliss and Sam Keen in America. Alan noted that Mythopoetic ideas had originally been excitedly embraced by the men's movement in New Zealand. Upon more careful analysis and through exploration and experience, the ideas espoused by the Mythopoetics have since lost favour with the New Zealand men's movement. Primarily this seems to be because Mythopoetics blame women for the problems that men face in their lives.

Some of the New Zealand men have been influenced by the Mythopoetical stuff and I feel sorry about that. For me its continued to hold women responsible for issues, and its continued to avoid addressing some of the emotional stuff.

Alan constructs the influence of the Mythopoetical perspective as being

inappropriate to New Zealand because it avoids "the emotional stuff" and continues to "hold women responsible for issues" that belong to men. Alan believes that Mythopoetics seek to avoid their role in the establishment of social systems and structures by essentially "blaming the victim." Clearly this "blaming the victim" is an attempt by these men to deny their participation in, and maintenance of, a system that legitimates the powerful and delegitimises the weak.

Consequently Alan has rejected this type of analysis because it de-emphasises the interactive process of forming social structures, value systems and ideologies.

### *Does New Zealand Influence the American Men's Movement?*

Richard Collins examines the link between the expansion of American cultural products and the emergence of questions regarding national identity. In Culture, Communication and National Identity he identifies the United States as the "dominant force in the internationalisation of culture".<sup>3</sup> However he does not conclude that the United States is a hegemonic force because "internationalisation is an

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Collins, Culture, Communication and National Identity: The Case of Canadian Television, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p4.

American experience too."<sup>4</sup> Collins' study is important because it highlights underlying themes of national identity and the globalisation of culture.

Ken believed that New Zealand did have an influence on American men's non-violence programmes.

I think certainly we have stuff to say around our experience, around what we do, what we don't do, what's worked, what hasn't, what's worked for our particular cultural mix...I think we're part of an international place now really. Although America is well advanced in terms of research in the area, in terms of practice I think we have been as good as.

Even though America is identified as the "dominant force" in the globalisation of culture New Zealand is identified as having a reciprocal influence on American culture. Ken believes that "we're part of an international place now" which suggests that there has been a bilateral blurring of the boundaries of national identity in the face of globalisation.

John Tomlinson concurs with this challenge to the assumption of homogeneity in his book Cultural Imperialism. He suggests that there may be "a difficulty in identifying a unified national cultural identity in the 'invaded country,' but the same might be said of the putative 'invader.'"<sup>5</sup> One country may establish hegemony over another, but

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<sup>4</sup> R. Collins, Culture, Communication and National Identity, p4.

<sup>5</sup> John Tomlinson, Cultural Imperialism, (London: Pinter, 1991), p74.

nevertheless the "invaded country" is still able to influence the "invader" as the process of globalisation continues.

## CHAPTER VI

### MEN'S OPPRESSION

This chapter will deal with men's oppression and I anticipate objections of the kind that state that "men are not oppressed - women are". Florence Rush articulates this objection as artfully as any in her article "The Many Faces of the Backlash." She argues that as men have traditionally been culturally sanctioned to exert power and dominance over women that "[t]he concept of male liberation has no basis in history".<sup>1</sup> Rush bases her argument on the premise that men's hierarchical position precludes them from being oppressed.

In opposition to critiques like Rush's I suggest that it is the system of cultural conditioning that is at fault and it is this system which requires scrutiny from both sexes in order to relieve both men and women from the effects of this system. Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony constructs oppressions as being held in place by the "consent" of the oppressed group. Neither men nor women are at fault or to blame for "creating" these men who oppress others.

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<sup>1</sup> Florence Rush, "The Many Faces of the Backlash" in Dorchon Leidholt and Janice G. Raymond (Ed's) The Sexual Liberals and the Attack on Feminism, New York: Pergammon Press, p167.

Peter Berger adds insight into how culture is generated and maintained illuminating the complex process of internalising and externalising individual experiences. It is the individuals internalised experience in interaction with other individuals that helps produce culture and the social structure that maintains it.

Internalization is...the reabsorption into consciousness of the objectivated world in such a way that the structures of this world come to determine the subjective structures of consciousness itself.<sup>2</sup>

Individuals learn through subjective experience with others how their culture is structured. Or in other words, the social structures in interaction with individuals provide a framework for individuals so that they can make sense of their world. Culture can therefore be seen as quite fluid as there is constant negotiation of cultural structures as individuals strive to create and recreate their world through their intersubjective experiences.

If we apply Gramsci's theory of hegemony then we note that the position of men is maintained, in part, due to the "consent" or the negotiated accommodation obtained from all oppressed groups, including women. And while not denying this oppression as brutal and damaging, I would also suggest that the maintenance of oppressive structures also extracts a toll. Exploring this issue will highlight the "internal logic"

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<sup>2</sup> Peter L. Berger, The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion, (New York: Doubleday, 1967), p15.

and the conflicting tensions involved in maintaining and reproducing oppressive social structures.

Traditional masculinity appears to be a linchpin in the patriarchal system. This model of masculinity prescribes that men, among other things, should be strong and should be in control. In fact this model prescribes that the more things a man controls, including himself, the better. However it is impossible for all men, as individuals, to control all other people with whom they come into contact. Therefore some men have more power or control than others. Not all men are capable - due to their class position, racial background or other factors - of attaining the culturally prescribed "goal" that is enshrined in the model of traditional masculinity. This is not to say that all men do not benefit from the system of patriarchy, but rather that the benefits men receive vary according to their position in the social structure.

Ian Harris, in his book Messages Men Hear argues that

Gender conditioning from 'stoic', 'tough guy', 'self-reliant' and 'superman' messages teaches men to deny they have problems. Men stick with the status quo until divorce, addiction, or stress related medical problems hit them.<sup>3</sup>

The messages that men gain from their conditioning teach them to strive for, what are quite often, unattainable goals. In striving for these goals men are provided with a sense of order and legitimation through their

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<sup>3</sup> Ian M. Harris, Messages Men Hear: Constructing Masculinities, (Taylor & Francis: London, 1995), p193.



intersubjective experiences with others. Wuthnow's interpretation of Berger suggests that

The requirement for integration is not at the institutional level, but at the individual level, the level of meaning, the way the social order is legitimated. And legitimation is variously and subjectively construed in society.<sup>4</sup>

Thus mens behaviour is judged and legitimated on a subjective basis by individual men in interaction with other men and women. To be judged as "normal", men create their own personal sense of order that legitimates and validates their experience as men.

Men through their interaction with others, get a sense of culturally appropriate behaviour. If they do the "right thing" they are validated, if they do not they are invalidated, or worse. This chapter will now focus on the price that men pay for seeking validation in a patriarchal system.

In chapter four we examined the five perspectives on masculinity that are currently in favour in America and New Zealand. Chapter five examined some of the ways in which the interaction between American and New Zealand cultures is perceived by the New Zealand men's movement. In this chapter I will present a different interpretation of the cultural landscape of life for New Zealand men. I will examine how men's position in an oppressive social structure is reproduced and the ways in which it directly and personally affects their lives.

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<sup>4</sup> R. Wuthnow et al., Cultural Analysis, p27.

Men are negatively conditioned in two general ways. Firstly, the ideal of masculinity, in whatever form it takes, constructs appropriate modes of behaviour that are restrictive and often unattainable.

Secondly, men are pressured into rigid ways of behaving based on this ideal. The ideal of masculinity is culturally sanctioned and, I suggest, damages men because of its inherently restrictive nature.

### *How Men's Oppression Affects Men*

Unlike slaves or women in a patriarchal system, men's oppression is largely an internalised oppression. Men adopt behaviours and attitudes about themselves, as men, in order to gain cultural legitimation. These behaviours and attitudes are significant because of the meaning that men, as part of the larger social structure, attach to them. Wuthnow's understanding of Berger's theories suggests that the meanings of these behaviours and attitudes become

objectified in the artifacts of culture - ideologies, belief systems, moral codes, institutions etc. In turn, these meanings become reabsorbed into consciousness as subjectively plausible definitions of reality, morally sanctioned codes of personal and collective behaviour, rules of social discourse, and general recipes for daily living.<sup>5</sup>

Men are thus required to perform to a set of culturally determined

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<sup>5</sup> R. Wuthnow et al., Cultural Analysis, p25.

subjective standards in order to be personally and socially legitimated.

The behaviours and attitudes of men are attributed with meanings.

These meanings become externalised by men as "artifacts of culture - ideologies, belief systems, moral codes, institutions etc." In interaction with both men and women these "artifacts of culture" are reabsorbed as "subjectively plausible definitions of reality". This socially constructed world relies heavily upon the meanings attached to behaviour and the processes of reabsorption and externalisation to continue to provide a subjective legitimation of men's behaviour.

This section presents seven assumptions about men's behaviour as articulated by my interviewees. These men articulate the ways in which behaviours, attitudes and belief systems are legitimated or deligitimated by other men. The seven assumptions also demonstrate how the processes of reabsorption or internalisation and externalisation provide an explanation of the specificities of men's oppression. I believe that there are other areas in which men's lives are affected by men's oppression such as competition and their vulnerability to addictions for example. However because of my interview structure these areas are not included in my analysis.

(1) *Emotionally Inexpressive Men*

Men are trained from an early age to severely restrict the expression of emotion. To express fear or hurt for example, can lead to verbal taunts such as "sissy", "cry baby" or "girl". These taunts, which are always accompanied with the threat of, or actual violence, serve to deligitimise the expression of emotion as a bona fide experience for men. Men learn to associate the taunts with the experience of deligitimisation. To avoid this invalidation they learn to restrict their emotional expression in order not to be identified as "female."

The fear of being identified as feminine or gay encourages men to repress their emotional lives. Violence is often used against men who display "unmanly" effeminate behaviour. Ken has been extensively involved with stopping men's violence programmes. Through his work in these programmes he has witnessed the contradictions of men's expressive behaviour. He states that

men are quite emotional and we see that clinically when men have been abusive to their partners. They're very thoughtful, very caring, often quite expressive *after* the act.

As Ken points out men in fact feel very deeply. The training that men receive as they grow up can never eradicate their emotions, it can only repress them. In all too many cases many men inappropriately express their emotions by being physically or emotionally abusive to those they

claim to care about. There may be other relevant issues that motivate the expression of emotion for abusive men, such as the desire to avoid prosecution or control issues, but nevertheless men can express "positive" emotions when they choose to.

Emotions such as anger and rage are "acceptable" to a "manly" man because they do not require men to relinquish their power. George, with his extensive experience in counselling men and training counsellors to counsel men puts it this way: "Men don't have emotions. Or if they do, they bust out sideways." Despite being stereotyped as emotionless, men do have emotions, however these are usually repressed. If they are not repressed emotions are often manifested in an inappropriate fashion, that is "they bust out sideways." Either way both of these behaviours are observable in men and thus can be considered part of the gender role.

People believe that not expressing emotions is how men behave. This stereotyped perception of men has in its turn become internalised by men so that, as George states "[T]he emotionally inexpressive male...is the common male figure in society". Men repress their emotions because they get legitimated by other older men who have been conditioned to repress their emotions as well. The "common male figure" is generated through men interacting with other emotionally inexpressive men so that not expressing emotions becomes an observable

characteristic of the masculine gender role.

Intimacy is difficult for "real men" because it involves considerable use of emotional energy. Sex on the other hand, is viewed as a legitimate way for "real men" to experience physical closeness with another human being. George, relates the impact that feminism had on his intimacy skills.

It faced me up with the fact that my intimacy was always cognitive or physical, sex or mind talk but no way of meeting...Women would say to me 'You're not talking to me, you're talking at me.' Or 'You're flirting with me, do you want to know who I am?' So I was emotionally inexpressive.

George concludes that his intimacy had no emotional base from which to support itself. Instead his intimacy was either "cognitive or physical, sex or mind talk". The lack of emotion required by the stereotype of masculinity for this kind of "intimacy" makes it a part of the gender role for men. George concludes in hindsight that this was not really intimacy as there was "no way of meeting."

Some men are induced into oppressing other groups of men and women by the lure of dubious "benefits" and "privileges." In this way a majority of men take for granted the reality that they are oppressed by a minority of men, but they also take for granted the reality of how they oppress other groups such as women, people of colour, gay people and young people.

Berger contends that social structures are able to be maintained because they are personally and socially meaningful while being enacted within structurally stable environments. In these terms Wuthnow suggests that

[t]he reality of everyday life as it is objectively held in common with others and as it is subjectively grasped by consciousness depends upon the presence of a social structure within which this reality is taken for granted.<sup>6</sup>

When men hold the belief that they should oppress others they share in a common belief with other men that this is the way that things should be, that is they take this belief for granted.

In many ways men are locked into maintaining and reproducing a hierarchical system in which they are personally and socially invested. In a sense men can be seen to be their own worst enemy. They can be seen dualistically as suffering from oppression while simultaneously acting as the agents of their oppression. They actively participate and collude in the maintenance and perpetuation of their own oppression.

## (2) *Homophobia*

Homophobia is a socially constructed behaviour that dictates that men should not be physically or emotionally intimate with each other.

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<sup>6</sup> R. Wuthnow et al., Cultural Analysis, p52.

Homophobia helps to maintain the social structure in which masculinity is enshrined. Homophobia is also simultaneously a part of the gender role for men as well as being part of the stereotype of masculinity.

John Stoltenberg in his article "Toward Gender Justice" argues that homophobia is an essential building block for patriarchy. As he puts it the patriarchal order

requires that men maintain their brotherhood through a common contempt of women; and that the male homosexual act is construed as a threat to the male-male bond, since there is the implication that one of the partners gets fucked as a woman.<sup>7</sup>

Gay men are viewed as "traitors" in these terms because they may display "feminine" behaviour such as being emotionally expressive.

"Real men" feel threatened by such behaviour and construct gay men as a challenge to the patriarchal order because gay men do not necessarily agree to be misogynistic.

Homophobia can therefore be seen as an important component in our understanding of masculinity. The men I interviewed agreed that this was so. Alan has led "The Male System" course at the local Polytechnic for the last fourteen years. This course explores themes such as men's conditioning, power, collusion and violence, intimacy, relationships and sexuality. Alan considers that homophobia is an integral part of the process of men's conditioning and as such it needed

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<sup>7</sup> J. Stoltenberg, "Toward Gender Justice", p77.



to be addressed in the course. He believed that

Homophobia is a part of it. It has to be a part of it because it's about being with men. These courses are about men and we have to address it.

Alan suggests that homophobia is an important part of men's experience, a part that cannot be ignored. By providing a theoretical framework that explains how homophobia maintains hierarchical relationships between men, Alan highlights a key area that some men may not even be aware of. Courses for men, like Alan's, will almost certainly arouse feelings of homophobia which necessitates the development of a course programme that reflects the centrality of homophobia to men's experience.

Homophobia places a barrier between men and greatly reduces the amount of emotional contact that men could have with each other. Men are trained to rally around the banner of manly behaviour as a means of demonstrating their "superiority." This "manly" code of behaviour suggests that emotions are a sign of weakness and that any persons, either men or women, who display emotions automatically label themselves as weak or substandard. As such homophobia helps to maintain hierarchical relationships between men by labelling any men that behave in an "unmanly" manner as either gay or feminine. This process of separating "the men from the boys" legitimises the "superiority" of "manly" men. According to this model anyone who is

not included in this category is relegated to the status of women, that is, "inferior" and worthy of mistreatment.

### (3) *Fathering*

Wuthnow's translation of Berger suggests that identity formation always takes place within the context of a specific social structure. Identity will therefore "reflect the social structural conditions from which it emerges."<sup>8</sup> Young men growing up in a patriarchal system will therefore begin to take for granted the behaviours that men have learned under this particular social structure. If young men look around them at other men, and especially their fathers they gain a blueprint of behaviour - a "formula for success" if you will. The issue of fathers and sons and what behaviours and attitudes are passed between the generations has become an issue of concern for the men's movement.

Ken who has been involved in social work and particularly with men's violence in the family, noted with concern the importance of fathering.

I think the issue of men as parents is a major issue in terms of their involvement with children, their ability to be parents, to be supportive of their partner if they want to work, and those kind of questions.

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<sup>8</sup> R. Wuthnow et al., Cultural Analysis, p45.

Ken identifies three key areas on the issue of men as parents. Firstly, their involvement with their children. The traditional masculine stereotype does not present men as being heavily involved with raising children. Men are not perceived as nurturing but are allowed to play rough and tumble games and are usually expected to provide discipline for children. Secondly, traditional stereotypes of men's behaviour cast doubts on men's ability to be parents. These stereotypes do not encourage men to develop the skills necessary for parenting. Thirdly, men are raised with the expectation that they should provide for their family. Supporting their partners if they choose to work goes against the traditional model of masculinity that they have been raised to believe in. If their partner does work then men question their role as the "man of the family".

#### (4) Expectations of Violence

Many men had fighting as a regular part of their daily existence, just to maintain a respected position among their peers, to avoid being shunned as a sissy, or to avoid becoming a target for bullying. Violence is one part of proving yourself as a man to other men. Some men have refused to fight and have paid a terrible toll of isolation from other men and often shame about not fighting back.

Ken, in his work with abusive men, identified a strong link between the wielding of power, manifested as violent behaviour, and a sense of personal identity. Based on his work experience Ken believes that both abusive and non-abusive behaviour are personally and socially integrated which makes any kind of behavioural transformation extremely difficult.

[W]hen we do a behaviour, and our sense of who we are is based on that behaviour, we become quite entrenched with it. So y'know, we're asking in some ways a big ask of men to give that away. And what we're doing in some ways is marketing the positives of non-abusive behaviour. And for some men they don't seem that attractive because you've got to give up being in charge. And there's a high cost of being in charge, a high cost, very isolated.

Ken identifies some of the inherent difficulties in transforming the behaviour of abusive men. Becoming non-abusive entails giving up "being in charge" and if men's "sense of who we are is based on that behaviour" then men must in essence reconstruct the masculine gender role with which they have been raised. As such, their sense of who they are as men must change.

The behaviour of abusive men becomes entrenched and is rooted in power relationships. Thus to get abusive men to change their behaviour becomes, in part, a task of "marketing the positives of non-abusive behaviour" to men whose entire identity is constructed around a different value system. This task also includes emphasising the

"high cost of being in charge" to abusive men as a way of highlighting the unacceptable price of traditional masculine behaviour.

(5) Work

Masculine identity is closely related to work. Men are made to believe that they as individuals are not important, but rather what they produce is paramount. Mike who has run work transition and careers courses for men suggests that employment plays a central part in men's experience. To be unemployed, or not producing, can be equated with the idea of not being "useful." Mike states that men's identity

is very much tied around work. And a lot of the life affirmations are tied up with work, the quality of work is very important. And we have things like the man who instead of telling his wife that he'd actually been made redundant, went and hired a flat, got up every morning got to the flat every day, stayed there until he'd 'finished work', and went back home again.

By connecting "life affirmations" and "work" Mike clearly highlights the centrality of work to the masculine gender role. The subject of Mike's story felt he had no identity without his work. The shame of not being able to provide for his family like a "real man" was so great that he could not even tell his wife of his misfortune. Because a lot of "life affirmations are tied up with work", being out of work denies men opportunities to obtain those "life affirmations." Unemployment

effectively means that men are unable to be legitimated by the social system. As such their personal and social identity sustains a devastating blow.

As an experienced counsellor Richard does not appear surprised by the situation that many men find themselves in after they retire. He suggests that

It's no accident that many men suicide in their 60s and 70s, or that they die younger than women in general. I think many of them lose the will to live because we have been socialised and reared to consider ourselves as 'men workers,' providers for our families, breadwinners and the one job for life notion I grew up with.

By considering "ourselves as 'men workers'" men collude with their own oppression by not rejecting or deviating from their socialisation. In these terms "it's no accident" that men pay the high price of "suicide in their 60s and 70s, or that they die younger than women". The fact that men "die younger than women in general" has been interpreted as an effect of men's oppression.<sup>9</sup> However, during their active working life men do benefit from being socialised into "men workers" because they are personally legitimated and valued by society. As "men workers" men have a socially approved role to fulfil in society. Their work acts as a symbol of their membership within the larger social order. The social order can only maintain itself in a symbolically organised world,

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<sup>9</sup> Men's rights activists in particular argue that this is so. See for example Warren Farrel's The Myth of Male Power.

made meaningful through collective participation in symbolic activities such as work.

#### (6) Control

Controlling and suppressing emotions is a difficult task. Men block their emotions because they are conditioned to believe that showing emotions is not a part of their gender role behaviour.

Rather it is seen as a sign of weakness and of not being in control. George has found in his work as a counsellor that control is a highly exalted behavioural trait among men. Men need to feel that they are in

control, either of themselves or their partners or their meaning. Men don't sit easily with not being in control. That's our whole socialisation - to be in charge, never let yourself be seen to be weak.

Social reality for some men consists of "being in control" and never being "seen to be weak." Men are socially sanctioned for displaying this gender role behaviour which is in itself produced, internalised and legitimated through the process of socialisation. Maintaining control "either of themselves or their partners" perpetuates unequal power relationships that are, in the final analysis, damaging to men and women alike. Convincing men that there would be benefits if they gave up

some of that power and control remains a key challenge for the men's movement.

(7) *The Great Pretender*

The power of the masculine stereotype means that often when men are having difficulties maintaining their role they must pretend in order to avoid being discovered and being thought of as "unmanly." Men take great pride in their ability to be able to cope on their own. However it is becoming increasingly clear that this stereotype has little to do with the reality of the masculine gender role. Ken who runs stopping violence programmes describes the difficulty that abusive men have in coming forward to get help for their behaviour.

It's that initial step that's so hard really because of the kind of attitude 'I can do it by myself' - and they can't.

To admit to themselves that they have a problem is that "initial step that's so hard" because they still believe that they can "do it by myself". The conditioning they have undergone complete with all the legitimisation they receive for being "independent," stoic and in control suddenly leaves them high and dry. These men essentially need to replace their socialisation with a new set of behaviours and attitudes. They can no longer pretend that everything is fine and that they can solve their



problems on their own.

Richard, prior to being a counsellor was a senior social worker for Healthlink South. He discussed his perceptions of the prevalence of sexism within the health industry. He suggested that in the past sexism was quite overt, whereas now it has become more covert. He concluded that

Behaviours may have modified, attitudes haven't. And those attitudes come out in small idiosyncratic ways from time to time and when one is alert to them...I find myself saying 'Oh yes, I know what you're on about.'

Richard demonstrates the tenacity with which men hold on to their old ways of behaving. Sexist attitudes and behaviour are now manifested in "small idiosyncratic ways". This new form of sexism can go undetected unless "one is alert". Men who still harbour sexist attitudes are pretending that there is no change to the validity of their "self-evident truth." Their attitudes have not changed and they deny the existence of a plurality of reality definitions.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

If we apply Berger's theoretical framework of culture to the men's movement as a whole then we could conclude that the men's movement is, in essence, demonstrating that there is a plurality of reality definitions for men. That is to say that there are many ways to be a man, and many ways to transform men. The five perspectives from chapter four and the voices of my interviewees demonstrate that masculinity can no longer be accepted as a monolithic phenomenon. Rather men can, by responding to the messages from the men's movement, choose their own definition of reality. Even if men choose to ignore the men's movement they can no longer rely upon the self-evident truth of traditional constructions of masculinity. "Social reality" is constructed only through interaction with others. Therefore if some men begin a process of change then their new behaviours will hopefully impact upon the social structures that attempt to uphold traditional constructions of masculinity.

The reasons that men may choose their own definition of reality is dependant upon and regulated by social context. Social reality for men

is the end product of a process of internalising certain behavioural attributes that legitimise the individual. Behaviours take on symbolic significance in this context. Wuthnow's restatement of Berger's theories contends that

It is conversation with others that mediates the reality of the symbolic universe. When this conversation is interrupted or undermined, as in the case where a plurality of reality definitions are in simultaneous competition with each other, the reality itself ceases to impose itself as a self-evident truth.<sup>1</sup>

The "reality of the symbolic universe" is therefore negotiable and created through a process of internalising behaviours that legitimate the individual. Behaviours can lose their symbolic significance if "a plurality of reality definitions are in simultaneous competition with each other". Alternative ways of behaving are an example of a "plurality of reality definitions". If a behaviour that has been internalised loses its symbolic significance then it can no longer be relied upon as a "self-evident truth." And if there is no "self-evident truth" then choices are available to people within their social contexts to create their own reality.

Some of the men I interviewed held tentative visions of alternatives to patriarchy. Others had visions of the *processes* that would enable alternatives to be realised. George "was in on the dream" when Mensline was first conceived. He appears disappointed that the

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<sup>1</sup> R. Wuthnow et al., Cultural Analysis, p52.

focus of Mensline seems to be for what he calls "needy men". He believes this is an important function but "there's no attraction for healthy men to go there". He envisioned a centre "with people there available all day, videos, books, kind of a coffee bar where men could go and relax." Essentially it would provide for those "needy men" but it would also be a place for

a lot of guys like me who haven't had a place, a forum, to think those kind of issues through. It would provide a safe place for gay men, it would provide a forum with high quality debates and things going on, and all the top video stuff from around the world. Put it up and then talk about it over a meal, really good kitchen and all that kind of stuff.

Essentially what George envisioned was a place where "healthy men" could model their behaviour to "needy men", and in this way change the way men behave. By providing a variety of opportunities or experiences the centre could hope to attract a variety of men who could then be exposed to "healthy" ways of being men.

In a broader sense George thought that dismantling patriarchy would require a leap of faith from men and he was unsure what would replace it. However, whatever would replace patriarchy

would be gentler, and it would be more humane and the primary issue would be social justice, not wealth. And we would then begin to redefine the world in terms of pathology as continuing to earn and work ridiculous hours when you've got \$500,000 in the bank. That would be regarded as pathology.

George claims that redefining pathology in terms of wealth would enable

"social justice" to be seen as the "primary issue" in the world. He thus highlights the connection between wealth, power and oppression.

Wealth, power and oppression are all predicated on the need to maintain the hierarchical construction of society. Accumulating wealth and power necessitates exploiting and oppressing others. However, if the world was less concerned with accumulating wealth then the principles of equality and social justice would be more likely to flourish.

Ken argued that "by intervening with men who are violent in their families" they can stop the "violence leading to further violence".

Another facet of his work involves "comments to the media, comments in public submissions to parliament around legislation" and he argues that to have a sufficient impact you need to combine the two types of action. That is, maximum impact on social structures can be obtained by working on a personal or grass roots level and combining that with political or structural change as well.

George also agreed that structural change was crucial to concretise any personal changes that men may make. George felt that "dealing with male violence without dealing with social and structural violence is a waste of time". George's comment was made in the context of the 1995 Hitting Home report. This report examined men's attitudes towards family violence. George criticised the report because it "very conveniently put violence in a family context without putting the family

in the context of economic violence." George thus highlights the need to look beyond problematic behaviours and to focus on the structures in society that legitimise and account for those behaviours.

George thought that when the feminist movement first came along that it had great potential for changing the world. His thinking has shifted since then because "I realised it's a patriarchal structure and men have got to change it, not women." This represents a major problem because, as George sees it, "patriarchy's now got a life of its own quite apart from us men...the tail's now wagging the dog." George's opinion highlights the need to combine personal and political action to achieve change. He accepts that society is "a patriarchal structure" which implies that men dominate and have greater access to power than women.

However, patriarchy has now become so reified that it is no longer perceived as being a product of culture. George suggests that men feel powerless to change patriarchy because they no longer perceive themselves as active participants in the process of making culture, with all its itinerant structures and ideologies. The extent to which men feel powerless to change patriarchy is evident in George's comment that there are even some men who are saying "It's not our task." Convincing men that it is their task, and that they have a greater ability to change institutional structures because of their greater access to

power, remains a serious obstacle to change and is a contested area for the men's movement.

Some men are so convinced that changing the world is not their task that they attempt to deny that the world is already changing all around them. Tony, who has been a Mensline Support Group facilitator for three and a half years has experience with men who display this attitude.

Some men can't actually see what's happening with the way they communicate or relate. They think that they're alright when they actually might be being abusive or violent. But I think generally some men have got their heads in the sand and that's quite scary really. I find that quite scary. Just haven't got a clue.

Tony highlights an important issue when considering how to change the behaviour of men. Men are so used to denying and suppressing their emotions that they "can't actually see what's happening". Quite literally they may not even notice if they are being "abusive or violent." Or if they do notice they may put "their heads in the sand" rather than confront the problem. Tony's concern about the strength of denial some men display focuses on the disparity between the problematic behaviour and the distinct lack of action taken to remedy the problem. It seems that the unwillingness of men to confront their issues, to keep "their heads in the sand" is rooted in the belief that by doing so they can maintain their "social reality" or their "self evident truth."

Even men's movement leaders are affected by this attitude of denial. Pretending that the men's movement is making progress towards real structural change in society seems to be a flaw that the movement has suffered from its very inception. Through his involvement in the men's movement George believes that the movement has been too insular and has not been fanatical about spreading the message to a greater number of men.

I have a hunch that one of the problems with the men's movement is that what we've learned to do is to get into men's groups around the town and associated with guys who've led the movement. And while that's a good learning base, we haven't, I don't think, had a knack or developed a way of going out from that group and saying to the group of men we work with, or play with, this is what I'm doing. So we haven't been, if you like, 'evangelical' and I don't know how we would be, cause there's a higher risk of getting 'What are ya?' if you tried. But the early Christians got fed to the lions and probably a few of us could do the same.

The need to pretend that everything is under control is so much an ingrained part of men's socialisation that it seems that not even men's movement leaders can escape from it. George believes that men who participate in the men's movement need to say "this is what I'm doing" to the men they "work with or play with". So far the movement has consisted of insular "in groups" and men have not "developed a way of going out from that group" and increasing their membership. The reason they have not done this is because "there's a higher risk of getting 'What are ya?'" George has highlighted a crucial determinant



for the future of the men's movement - for if the movement fails to grow then it's message certainly will not either. The question remains: Is the men's movement pretending that everything is all right, rather than being "evangelical" about it and perhaps effecting real change? Without being "evangelical" is the men's movement as committed to change as they claim to be, or are they only committed to the politics of feeling good? Altering institutional structures like patriarchy is an aspiration the men's movement claims to support. This desire creates a dialectical tension for men who wish to resolve the conflict they experience at finding themselves caught between two worlds of conflicting realities.

Patriarchy brings hegemonic pressure to bear on men and simultaneously influences and enables traditional constructions of masculinity to maintain themselves. Patriarchy also provides us with a visible articulation of the power and influence that social structures have on an individuals behaviour and attitudes. Wuthnow's interpretation of Berger notes that

While institutions provide a background of stable definitions of reality, patterns of behaviour and so on, there is a foreground where individuals are capable of making choices, creating, innovating and manipulating.<sup>2</sup>

Individuals accommodate institutions, such as patriarchy, because they

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<sup>2</sup> R. Wuthnow et al., Cultural Analysis, p43.

provide them with their most "stable definitions of reality". However there is certainly a "foreground" that is open to multiple reality definitions, negotiation and resistance. In general most of the interviewees did not directly challenge social structures through overt political action. Rather they resisted the influence of patriarchy through more personalised action.

Some of the perspectives on masculinity, such as the New Traditionalists, do not openly acknowledge the existence of patriarchy. These men illustrate the way in which men have become alienated from the world which they inhabit. Patriarchy has been reified to such an extent that the fact that it is socially constructed is often obscured.

Berger explains that

The product now appears to the producer as an alien facticity and power standing in itself and over against him, no longer recognizable as a product. In other words, alienation is the process by which man forgets that the world he lives in has been produced by himself.<sup>3</sup>

Institutions, such as patriarchy, occupy the "background" of reality definitions and are not recognised as a negotiable area. Through the process of reification man is alienated because he forgets that "the world he lives in has been produced by himself." Rather it is only the "foreground" of reality definitions where contestation takes place with

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Berger and Stanley Pullberg, "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness", History and Theory 4 (1964-65), 200.

the result that radical changes to society are rare.

This "foreground" is the primary area of contestation by the men's movement to date. This I find to be somewhat disappointing but understandable given the rigorous socialisation that men undergo. The specific ways in which men are conditioned, and the results of that conditioning have been detailed in chapter six. We have seen some of the stereotypes of men's behaviour and have noted that some of these stereotypes have become internalised by men.

My interviewees have articulated and framed this thesis to present their perceptions of the social reality that men experience. Peter Berger's theoretical framework of culture has been used to demonstrate the validity of men's oppression by explaining how social rules are formed, modified and reabsorbed by men. However the constructed nature of reality does not eliminate the assignment of personal responsibility from men. Men are accountable in this process to themselves and to society. This important point is not lost to Rosemary Ruether who reminds us of this fact in her article "Patriarchy and the Men's Movement: Part of the Problem or part of the Solution?" It seems appropriate to end this thesis on this cautionary note. Ruether states that men

must begin by acknowledging their public reality as males in patriarchal society, and not retreat to a privatized self that avoids accountability for that public world. They must see that the

private self is not an autonomous entity, but a dependant appendage of these social power relations. To the extent that the leading gurus of the men's movement not only fail to do that, but exalt the traumas of socialisation of this dependent private self as the only reality, they avoid and deny such accountability.<sup>4</sup>

Ruether and Berger theoretically support Clatterbaugh's view of the entwined relationship between the gender role and stereotype of the masculine identity. The stereotype of masculinity becomes reabsorbed through social interaction with others and internalised by men so that it becomes part of observable behaviour - the masculine gender role. Thus men are the authors of their own destiny because they co-produce, on a personal level, the substance of the gender role. Change is certainly possible, although if we are to believe Berger, it will most likely come from individuals - like the men I interviewed - who interact with, influence, and negotiate social rules with their clients and peers, and in this way hopefully facilitate institutional change to the social structures of society.

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<sup>4</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Patriarchy and the Men's Movement: Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?" in Women Respond to the Men's Movement: A Feminist Collection, ed. Kay Leigh Hagan (Pandora: San Francisco, 1992), p17.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I

#### *Biographical Sketches of the Interviewees*

The biographical sketches contained in this appendix were kindly composed by the men I interviewed.

(1) *Tony Bird, age 31*

I have been involved with Mensline for the past 4 years. One year doing telephone counselling for Mensline and 3 and 1/2 years being a facilitator in the Support Group which involves working with men in groups while providing a safe and trusting environment for men to explore issues that affect our lives!

(2) *Richard Bolstad*

Richard did not provide a biographical sketch himself but the following indicates some of his involvement with the men's movement. Richard was involved in establishing the Mensline Support Group and Telephone Counselling Service. He was a facilitator with Mensline but

due to work commitments he is no longer a facilitator.

(3) Mike Flavell, age 49

Parent, widower, step-parent, teacher, learner, re-learner, strong supporter of listening with a view to understanding differences, watched womens movement, supports rise of mens consciousness through men's supports groups, dislikes extremism whether political, religious, ethnic or gender orientated, counselling or individual growth focused, teaches at Christchurch Polytechnic (New Directions for Men, Career Review, Social Services training).

(4) Harold Kennedy

Harold did not provide a biographical sketch himself but the following indicates some of his involvement with the men's movement. Harold has worked on a part time basis for two years with the Family Planning Association providing education services for men on the issues of sex and sexuality in relationships. He has also been a counsellor and tutor with Relationship Services (formerly Marriage Guidance) for eight years. He has four and a half years experience with the Men's Violence Project and also works for Prisoners Aid.

(5) Walter Logerman, age 52

Has a background in teaching and social work and has run a private psychotherapy practice for ten years. Was married for ten years, then divorced and has been in a de facto relationship for the past eight years. Active in the men's movement since 1979 running weekend workshops for men, running men's groups, supervising leaders of men's groups as well as couple counselling.

(6) Ken McMaster

Ken McMaster lives in Christchurch with his wife Suzanne Hall. Born in Greymouth, Ken left to study at Massey University. He has a Masters Degree in Social Work.

Ken has worked at the cutting edge of men's change for the past fourteen years. In addition to pioneering the development of services for men in the area of family violence, he has also been a founding member of STOP, a community-based organisation that works with men who sexually offend.

He has co-authored (with Peter Swain) A Private Affair: Stopping Men's Violence to Women (GP Books, 1989) and regularly contributes articles to journals and newspapers. Ken is in demand as a trainer in this area, having run workshops throughout the country.

Ken works part-time as co-ordinator of the Men's Violence

Project in Christchurch and as a lecturer in the Social Work Department at the University of Canterbury. Currently Ken is the National Convenor of the National Network of Stopping Violence Services (NZ) Inc. He is also Deputy Chairperson of the Family Violence Advisory Committee, which advises the Minister of Social Welfare.

In addition to his passion for his vocation Ken enjoys travelling, working out at the gym, and good food and wine.

(7) Alan Marriott, age 53

Has a background in teaching, community work, adult education and runs a private practice in Person Centred Counselling. He has run courses for men since 1982 on issues of masculinity and male sexuality, emotional intimacy, relationships, conflict, sexual abuse and violence.

A published writer in both fiction and non-fiction, his book The Prance of Men (pub. 1988) was based on his work with men during the mid-eighties. Further non-fiction is on the way based on work with men in the mid-nineties on emotional intimacy, sexual boundaries, and the struggles of various facets of the men's movement to explore their own intimacy and boundaries.



(8) Mark Piercey

Mark did not provide a biographical sketch himself but the following indicates some of his involvement with the men's movement. Mark first became interested in men's issues in the early 1980s and completed Alan Marriott's "The Male System" course in 1984. He was a telephone counsellor at Mensline for two years before becoming a facilitator which he has now been doing for three and a half years.

(9) Richard Stewart, age 47

Married 14 years and first time father of 4 year old son.

My involvement with the "men's movement" goes back to the late 70s and was what led me to change career and take up health social work 15 years ago. As I began my own process of changing the way I thought felt and behaved as a man I gradually came to incorporate that awareness more and more into my work practise. At the same time I became formally involved with men's groups and was a founder member of Men Against Rape in Christchurch. Through that forum, and along with various other members of that group and some from elsewhere I was instrumental in organising and facilitating weekend workshops for men. Now I work in freelance practice as a counsellor and therapist and co-lead groups for men.

I endeavour to nurture good friendships with males who are

important to me, to enjoy those friendships, and to be the kind of father my son will want to be.

(10) George Sweet, age 66

George is a lover of jazz and classics and is a follower of Super 12 rugby. He loves Woody Allen movies. He has been active in men's groups and written about men's issues though is still unsure what they are. Currently running a course for counsellors on working with the Emotionally Inexpressive Male. One wife and three feminist daughters have done him a lot of good. He counsels (35 years) and teaches counselling.

## APPENDIX II

### Responses from Interviewees

To gain an element of interaction between my interviewees and this work I invited responses to an early draft from the participants. Some men responded verbally and others chose not to respond. Their letters are included in full, and unedited and hence some points they raise are no longer relevant due to the evolution of my thesis.

#### (1) Alan Marriott

Dear Gerard

Thanks for sending me a copy of your thesis. A lot of work which I hope you found challenging.

Yes, there are some comments I'll make. I will not write on your thesis - that's for you to do.

My comments are intended to assist further in your project and I hope you hear them that way.

When you first spoke with me, I gave you time because your theme matters to me and I was prepared to contribute to your understanding of your research. I did not at any stage view you as an "expert" (your word). You are the expert in how you want to prepare/present your work. I respect your approach and intention. However, in most of what I said to you, I expected you to have a

limited understanding of the depth, implications comparisons. I did not, and would not, provide you with the full substance of the issues I work with. You would have needed to have had a much more comprehensive background and life experience before I could have shared the fullness of that.

This is not a criticism, Gerard, of you. It is a clarification of a big difference between your experience and probably those of your interviewees. Your thesis can only therefore compare what you hear and understand at a somewhat surface level.

For example, you describe the work and comments from those you interviewed as similar. It just is not. It might sound that way - we might say we want similar outcomes. The differences are huge, significant, philosophical, value-laden, and the methods and processes of working stretch the length of a continuum. If your thesis stays on the surface of these differences, then comparisons with USA will also be on the surface. That can be okay given the constraints of your research time and experience if it's acknowledged. If, though, you work from the basis that your research has shown similarities as predominant, your thesis will have only a limited place as an accurate resource.

You label the men's movement into perspectives. This could lock you into a stance. Some of us might fit 1 or 2 of these. Most of the work in NZ doesn't. I don't. My emphasis is none of these, yet it has had a major contribution.

The Men's Rights groups have a greater hold than you believe. Visit some of the churches, law courts, political parties, pubs. A Spiritual perspective is not the same as Mythopoetical. This latter and its focus on men's rituals is very present in NZ.

Most of your quoted sources are American men or NZ women. Use the NZ material written by men if you want the male comparison.

It is there. It does emphasise the differences. You use a minor quote from *The Prince of Men* in isolation. It is the collection of characteristics together and in interplay which shapes our conditioning. Public role models can endorse or emphasise the conditioning - but the important role models are much closer to home. The conditioning starts from the earliest moments in our lives before we've ever met the public figures. It is far deeper than the figure we see. The important difference in my work is how we take that conditioning into the depths of our emotional self and relate through how these feelings have been shaped.

You see most of us working in this area as middle class. In class terminology, your argument might not be on safe grounds. Note that much of the conditioning framework has been contributed to by our middle classes. So there might not be anything futile if the middle classes challenge this, especially if they challenge themselves. Participants on all the courses I have ever run have ranged from low working class to upper middle class - usually at the same time. Whatever our class, we have recognised the similarity of the conditioning - it crosses class and culture.

Another issue for thought: The Male System Course series which I have run since 1982 without a break has been the longest running course for men in NZ. It also has the lowest drop-out rate of any course outside of weekend courses where figures have been produced. Its focus provides some insight into why.

Well Gerard, some thoughts from me. I hope they can contribute to your approach - they are intended to.

Gerard, yes, I would be interested in seeing the finished result.

My best wishes

Allan Marriott

(2) *Richard Stewart*

Yes, Gerard, I'd welcome a copy of the end result when that's available.

Comments:

Chapter One

The interest by a small group of men from Auckland in the Promisekeepers comes as no surprise, since I think they reflect a widely held body of thinking among NZ men. The worrying part of it is that that may become more formalised and organised here.

apropos of your breakdown of grouping within the men's movement. I suppose I view myself as standing in the Profeminist camp, sharing some of both the radical and the liberal views.

In relation to the socialist perspective, I wonder just how strong the link is between the worldwide spread of capitalism, freemarket economics, and the disenfranchising of (male) workers and the increasingly public and private violence exhibited by men.

I can't help but wonder how different our interview would have been had it occurred later in the sequence, given your comments about it being a learning experience for you. It would be interesting to speculate...

Chapter Three

I like very much the quote from Michael Kimmel (in 1992) about the need for "more ironing Johns". Very witty and insightful.

Bly's suggestion that single mother families raise soft men may be so in North America - though I doubt it - but I think that in NZ, generally speaking, the opposite is true. In my experience in counselling a number of men, and young men in families where the mothers influence is paramount in upbringing the man/young man is

frequently aggressive and hostile. That is not to blame mothers for a job poorly done, rather, that as Frank Pittman has pointed out, young men often lack appropriate, healthy adult role models.

Gerard, thanks for the opportunity of sharing these thoughts - yours and others - and of commenting on them.

As to further research I have no specific ideas, except that it might be interesting if a history of the men's movement's development in Christchurch were documented.

Thank you again. I look forward to receiving a final draft. It might be worth considering bringing together the men interviewed for this piece of work to exchange ideas and views having read those of others. Just a thought, along the lines of what George referred to of a meeting place for men to discuss ideas, etc

Yours in wishing and living for change

Richard Stewart

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